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Consuming illusions: inquiring into shopping malls and fiction in contemporary Australia

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CONSUMING ILLUSIONS:

Inquiring into Shopping Malls and Fiction in Contemporary Australia



A thesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

MASTER OF ARTS (HONOURS)

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

JULIENNE VAN LOON B.C.A. (HONS)

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the architecture of the contemporary shopping mall is set up through the devices of fiction. The aim is to consider the way in which the structure of the shopping mall might behave as an organisational device for other kinds of fiction. The thesis examines the fictional nature of everyday experience for consumers, as well as looking at the substantial body of fiction by Australia writers and filmmakers that is relative to the contemporary representation of the shopping mall.

The role of the consumer inside the shopping mall allows pleasure, play and the place for an active production of fictional narrative within everyday life. And yet this launch of the body, the self and the community into the mall and its ideologies brings into view its own set of discontents, containments and exclusions. The ‘fiction’ we enter through the sliding doors and elevators at the mall has many things to tell us about representation, and thus about the nature of contemporary Australian film and literature. The mall tells us something about the way we as readers enter a fiction and the expectations we have of it, but also about the position of the author and the reason for the meta-fictional nature of much contemporary writing. I am interested in how Australian writers might go about representing consumerism as a direct subject, but also as the background that must exist in any piece of fiction set in contemporary suburban Australia.

Discontents with the organisation of our daily experience beneath consumerism, as well as questions of neighbourhood and of desire, are well reflected in the work of contemporary Australian writers and filmmakers. As the inquiry continues, questions of representation reveal considerations of language, the self and the body.

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All photographs are the property of the author.

Preface

Due to the brevity of some of the short fictions, or prose poems looked at in the thesis, particularly the work of Gig Ryan and Joanne Burns, I have cited relevant works in full and included these in the Appendix. These works have been included as supporting material because I believe this gives a fuller illustration of their relevance to the thesis as a whole.

In regard to the films examined in the thesis, both *Shoppingtown* and *The Cat's Cradle* are available for loan from the National Library in Canberra. *Shoppingtown* is also held by the University of Technology Sydney Library at Ultimo, Sydney. Unfortunately copyright laws exclude a copy of these two works being available for inclusion as supporting material here.

The remaining texts studied in the course of the thesis, namely *Red Roses* by Ania Walwicz and *The Tax Inspector* by Peter Carey, are readily available at most libraries and bookshops.

Introduction



There is a basic ambiguity at the foundation of this inquiry into Australian shopping malls. It stems from an author who harbours at once both a deep distrust of the Americanisation of Australian culture and an inclination of a personal nature that involves public spaces. The public space, for those who take great delight in meandering away from their responsibilities at home or work, provides a plethora of anonymous conversations and of fragments from other people's lives. What is interesting then, is not just these two poles, but the spaces in between. On one level the contemporary shopping mall, as public space (and therefore public experience), simply institutionalises multinational capitalism as consumerism, materialism and advertising. Yet on another level, attending the mall is about a very personal desire - the desire to get away from the day to day home or work environment. It seems one can escape into and away from contemporary Western culture in the same breath.

Inside the mall, it is easy to be carried away by objects or displays which render the familiar strange. To interrupt the chore of mundane shopping business for a coffee, a look at something, a brief conversation with a stranger, to forget where it was one was supposed to be going. It seems that this addiction to tangents when alone in the mall is not unusual. In some ways it is the very personal nature of being carried off on a tangent that denies us recognition of the fact that this state of mind is communal and induced and indeed targetted.

Shopping and consumerism, it seems, are the ultimate in fiction. The way in which popular fiction structures our daily lives is the topic of much popular cultural theory. This thesis therefore aims to look at the body of theory regarding fiction as popular culture, but also to make connections between that and the field of theoretical writing on consumerism. Beyond this, the thesis also endeavours to consider architecture. The body of the thesis will inquire into the architecture of the shopping mall and the way in which it behaves as an organisational device for other kinds of fiction. A

principle objective is to look at the way in which the mall's designs can fall down into the stories told by filmmakers and writers living under its spell. Structure is considered as a physical device, but also as an ideological one.

The shopping mall encapsulates not just the objects and ideology of consumer capitalism, but sets up a specific relationship between our selves, our bodies, our sense of place and our sense of community. It behaves as a kind of passage for the way in which ownership and control are dealt back and forth between consumers and producers. Presently, the shopping mall is perhaps the most used public space in Australia; surpassing churches, beaches, travelling shows.

The 'fiction' we enter through the sliding doors and elevators at the shopping mall therefore has many things to tell us about representation, and thus about the nature of contemporary Australian film and literature. It tells about the way we as readers enter fiction and the expectations we have of it. It reveals problems to do with the position of the author and the reason for the meta-fictional nature of much contemporary writing. Accordingly, this thesis is concerned with how Australian writers might go about representing consumerism, as a direct subject, but also as the background that must exist in any piece of fiction set in contemporary suburban Australia.

It is argued that the ideologies and the discontents contained within the shopping mall can be seen to structure contemporary written and filmic fiction. This is certainly so in the contemporary representation of space, of neighbourhood, and of the sense of an ending in much local fiction. As the inquiry continues, questions of representation reveal considerations of the self and the body.

The research methods set up to establish the basis of this thesis as well as the basis of my practical work for the Master of Arts (Honours) degree, have encompassed four major areas. Firstly, the literature and film by local writers and filmmakers

deconstructing the nature of shopping and fiction in contemporary Australia, particularly the work of Joanne Burns and David Caesar's short film *Shoppingtown*. Secondly the theoretical writing by local and overseas writers on the nature of fiction, particularly Jean Baudrillard in the United States and Stephen Heath in London. Thirdly the field of writing on consumerism in regard to women's experience. Meaghan Morris has been very influential in this area, but so has the sheer volume of work on consumerism and shopping, from the United States to Perth. Fourthly, the shopping mall itself. A great deal of time has been spent at my own local mall, Miranda Fair. Much of the basis of this interpretation of the shopping mall as fiction therefore comes from experiential research practices - shopping, watching, listening and enquiring. Photography has also played a significant role in this experiential research. The photographs included in the course of the thesis are evidence of this time spent and are intended more as a scene setting device than anything else, as the pictures themselves are not directly referred to in any part of the main body of text. The personal experience of shopping, simultaneously consumer and researcher, has benefitted the process immeasurably.

By emphasising the fictional nature of contemporary shopping experiences, particularly their representation in recent Australian film and literature, this work is attempting to question the assumption that reality and representation are given and discreet categories. At the same time, I do not intend simply to de-mythologise. Consumer culture itself deliberately fails to disguise its powers of artifice, invention and myth. Rather, the thesis endeavours to retain a self-consciousness regarding the constructive nature of 'scientific objectivity'. That is, to posit meaning as an open concept, and not to strictly limit the reader's opportunities for interpretation. The intention is to inquire into the ways in which our everyday experience of consumerism as fiction influences and structures the workings of written and filmic texts. The method is to consider a different fictional element chapter by chapter, .

The body of the thesis begins with concepts of space, and the nature of physical and fictional discontinuity in the mall. This leads to the next problem, that is, the existence and survival of community in such a discontinuous landscape. Departing from the base of discussions in these first two chapters, the argument narrows down to some particulars, using recent fictional texts as case studies for acuminated discussions of language, the self, the body, and the fulfilment of consumer desire.

The findings are multiple and not necessarily conclusive. I hope that the reader may find reason to consider his/her own experiences of consumerism, in collaboration with this research, as a basis for some new thoughts on looking at how contemporary fiction works.

Chapter One

Discontinuous Space & the Fictioning Continuum: Questions of Orientation



Individual actions are framed by and grounded on three kinds of public conditions, three kinds of "public art" - the tangible (architecture), the audible (pop music) and the visual (movies)...these arts are part of everyday life. Not only are they *available*, they are *imposed*.

Vitto Acconci¹

...fictions everywhere, all pervasive, with consumption obligatory by virtue of this omnipresence, a veritable requirement of our social existence. We cannot live today without contact with this fictioning continuum.

Stephen Heath²

During the course of my research for this thesis I have witnessed the transformation of Miranda Fair, a shopping mall in Sydney's southern suburbs. Once a larger than average Westfield, the space now claims to be the largest shopping mall in the Southern Hemisphere. For two years I have been a regular user of, visitor to and researcher in this space. One of the most striking characteristics of the mall is its state of constant renovation. Even now, the grand opening of the transformed centre well over and done with, construction workers continue to dominate large areas of the mall, redesigning, renovating and refitting. Subsequently even regular users cannot boast orientation in this constantly discontinuous space. Since its grand expansion, the mall has marketed a new title. It is now called "Everything You Want."

Heinrich Klotz has described postmodernist architecture as "fiction as well as function".³ Meanwhile Judith Barry asks, "can we say that buildings accommodate what pictures represent - the social relations of a particular period of history?"⁴ The objective of this

first chapter is to foreground the concept of the *fictioning continuum*, that is, the way in which the structure of the shopping mall works as an omnipresent and deliberate fiction, particularly in regard to space. This discussion of discontinuity in space and its relationship to a fiction ostensibly continuous, sets up a number of tensions which will form the basis for arguments in the chapters to come.

As Vitto Acconci has already put forward here, individuals may be framed by and grounded in certain public conditions. The local shopping mall engages us within the tangible (architecture), but also surrounds us with opportunities for engagement within both the auditory and the visual. In his essay "The Public Organisation of Private Experience", Acconci proposes that architecture encloses time inside a place, and breaks up that space into particular places.⁵ One could say the same of the structure of any fictional narrative, and of the construction within that narrative of a fictional world. Acconci considers architecture as the idea and instrument of structure. He emphasises the word structure as a framing, designing and conditioning verb, suggesting not availability, but imposition. As already shown, Stephen Heath suggests the same of the fiction of everyday life. The *fictioning continuum*, he says, is all-pervasive, omnipotent and a veritable requirement of our social existence. Heath is not the first to acknowledge this. Cohen and Taylor, for example have proposed that:

All around us - on advertisements, hoardings, bookshelves, record covers, television screens - these miniature escape fantasies present themselves. This, it seems, is how we are destined to live, as split personalities in which the private life is disturbed by the promise of escape routes to another reality.⁶

Whether the fictioning continuum results in split personalities is arguable.⁷ What I am attempting to illustrate here is that the fictioning continuum set up inside the shopping mall

is integral and unavoidable, not however that it is impenetrable or that as consumers we are not equipped to negotiate with such a structure. According to John Fiske:

Shopping malls are key arenas of struggle at both economic and ideological levels, between those with the power of ideological practice (Althusser), hegemony (Gramsci), or strategy (de Certeau) and those whose construction as subjects in ideology is never complete, whose resistances mean that hegemony can never finally relax in victory, and whose tactics inflict a running series of wounds upon the strategic power.⁸

Ideological boundaries between the subjects (consumers) and those with the power of ideological practice (producers and retailers) are infinitely ambiguous and perhaps this is a key characteristic of consumer capitalism. It is surely the case in the mall, and all the more so because of the way in which boundaries between fictional worlds and reality remain indistinct.

In the shopping mall, as David Chaney has suggested, retailing is only part of and perhaps subordinate to the experience of the centre as an attraction in its own right. The spectacular is itself a form of narrative, and part of the innovatory force of early department stores was to create spectacular imagery for the then relatively new culture of consumerism.⁹ Architecturally, the experience of the mall as narrative is fed by regular renovation and refurbishment, as Miranda Fair has demonstrated. Layouts invariably incorporate split levels and numerous avenues reminiscent of sideshow alleys at the traditional annual 'showground' fair. Often the spectacle of the centre stage, able to be seen from numerous levels, works doubly to show off the spectacular nature of the architecture itself. In the North Western suburbs of Sydney, Macquarie Centre comes immediately to mind. Here the centre stage is placed directly before one of the building's

main features - a pair of hexagonal glass elevators - and sits immediately beneath the ample natural light of the central glass ceiling.

The sometimes deliberately confusing nature of shopping centre architecture has been pointed out by Zoe Sofia, who notes that to obtain a map at her own mega-regional shopping centre in Western Australia, one has to go to the centre manager's office. Maps are never openly displayed for the public. This is certainly the case at every mall this author has entered. Perhaps this is to do with the nature of what Umberto Eco has called "possible worlds", where one can never claim complete orientation. In *The Limits of Interpretation*, Eco speaks of the requirements for setting up "possible worlds":

In order to outline a fictional world in which many things must be taken for granted and many others must be accepted even though scarcely credible, a text seems to tell its Model Reader: "Trust me..."¹⁰

Somewhere between creating the spectacular display of the early department store and today's version of the mega-suburban shopping mall, the mall as "possible world" has been actively constructed.¹¹ Within this enclosed space, environment is not just controlled, but fantasised over. Tracey Davis cites a mall in Canada where

Half a million dollars worth of foliage, plentiful running water and natural light suggested somewhere other than wintery Edmonton. Reflective materials were deliberately chosen to give the illusion of permanent sunshine.¹²

The West-Edmonton mall, of which Davis speaks, also contains an artificial 'beach', and a holiday resort where people can stay inside the mall for weeks on end. Perhaps the impetus for such a fantasy may be understandable in the winter climate of Canada where temperatures soar well below zero for months on end. But in Australia, year round,

weather conditions hardly justify the desire for controlled seasons. Coming from the Australian perspective, Zoe Sofia associates the desire for such an artificial environment with a communal fantasy for infinite resources. The shopping mall, she says, establishes a concrete form for this fantasy and thereby "unconsciously justifies the plunder of an Earth conceived as a repository of exploitable resources."¹³ Sofia labels this substitution of resource consuming artificial environments for natural habitats, the 'science-fictionalisation of the real':

In science fiction culture Western Man goes beyond the phallic metaphor and simulates maternal qualities; his power is expressed in the re-origination of nature through the corporate matrix.¹⁴

In labelling the fictioning continuum of the shopping mall as science fiction, Sofia touches on another of the mall's day to day ambiguities. While the fictional world of the mall is idealist in the sense that it supports the illusion of infinite resources, science fictional Utopias traditionally fail. The genre of science fiction is more often about something suspicious.

In "Things To Do With Shopping Centres", Meaghan Morris speaks of the 'Edenic' allegories of the shopping centre:

...they (malls) are described as palaces of dreams, halls of mirrors, galleries of illusion...and the fascinated analyst becomes identified as a theatre critic, reviewing the spectacle, herself in the spectacle, and the spectacle in herself. The rhetoric is closely related, of course, to the vision of Eden, or paradise: the shopping centre figured as, if not exactly Utopian, then a mirror of Utopian desire, the desire of fallen creatures nostalgic for the primal garden, yet aware that their paradise is now an illusion.¹⁵

And so the fiction of the mall is not a self-sustaining "possible world", and as users, we have a conscious awareness of this artificial nature. According to Dolezel, fictional worlds are by their very nature, incomplete and 'semantically unhomogenous'. We must be aware as readers that these worlds cannot be a maximal and complete state of affairs. To this extent, he says, fictional worlds are small worlds.¹⁶

Or are they? According to Baudrillard, the whole of America exists in a state where reality is fiction and fiction, reality. For him, this is the basis of American culture. He encourages us to "enter the fiction of America, enter America as fiction." It is on the fictional level, says Baudrillard, that America dominates the world.¹⁷ Baudrillard's writings on America as fiction have to do with the concept of simulacra. Theories on this idea have been about for several decades and stem from the same concept of which Anders spoke in 1956:

When the event in its reproduced form becomes socially more important than its original form, then the original has to direct itself to its reproduction, so the event becomes the matrix of its reproduction. ¹⁸

Today, particularly in Australia, sport is probably the most obvious example of an event becoming the matrix of its own reproduction on radio and television. But, according to Baudrillard, in America *everything* is destined to reappear as simulation:

Landscapes as photography, women as the sexual scenario, thoughts as writing, terrorism as fashion and the media, events as television. Things seem only to exist by virtue of this strange destiny. You wonder whether the world itself isn't just here to serve as advertising copy in some other world.¹⁹

Baudrillard's writing in *America* seems often based on what Margaret A. Rose would call parody as meta-fiction.²⁰ The writing itself meanders between non-fictional and fictional kinds of narrative, whilst speaking *about* real life as fiction. The book is an account of Baudrillard's own journey through the United States. Throughout the journey he carries with him a preconceived idea of America based on both the U.S. he has experienced through the cinema, television and advertising, and on his own earlier writing where "reality no longer has time to take on the appearance of reality."²¹ The book provides a perfect example of the way in which meta-fictional tactics cannot disguise the author's own attempts at setting up a hierarchy. Baudrillard's phallogentric desire for the possession of spaces he sees as occupiable (such as the landscape, or the female body), clearly engages in an imperialism of the imagination. "I went in search of astral America, not social or cultural America," he says, "but the America of the empty." The ability for meta-fictional narratives to selectively sustain subordination is a relevant concern. It follows that the meta-fictional world foregrounded in the advertising and display of consumerism is able to work as coherently and as persuasively to divert our attention from capitalism as Baudrillard does to disguise his own subordination of women and land.

Burroughs brings a further element into the discussion of the fictioning continuum however, and that is the concept of spatial boundaries.

Present time is a film and if you are on set in present time you do not feel present time because you are in it...How many of you people can forget you were ever a cop a priest a writer leave everything you said and did behind and walk right out of the film? There is no place else to go. The theatre is closed.²²

As has been mentioned, the artificial environment of the mall consumes resources, and perhaps the most notable of these is space. Increasingly, there *is* no place else to go. The movie theatre, along with the town centre, has been incorporated into the mall.

One recent Australian short film illustrates the incongruence of contemporary relations between fiction, consumer capitalism and space very succinctly. *The Cat's Cradle* appeared at the Sydney Film Festival in 1992.²³ The film begins in a time and place we cannot precisely identify - it could be any depressed urban environment in the present or future. The opening scene is indoors and involves the dressing of a dead body. The wife/mother dresses her husband's corpse in his best clothes. Too poor to pay for a funeral, the family funeral party sets out, shovel in hand and cask-less body on shoulders, to find a place to bury their father. The first attempt is in a city park. The shovel is dug into grass, only to confront the sound of metal against cement: the grass is artificial and the 'real' earth beneath cannot be reached. Undeterred, the funeral party makes its way to a steelworks where they attempt to shove the corpse into one of the incinerators. The opening is too small and the body, now quite stiff, won't fit through. From place to place the party travels and always to find something stopping them from depositing the body. Eventually, all options barred, the party take the body to a cinema where they prop the stiff figure up in a chair and set him up to stare blankly at the film in progress on the cinema screen. One of the children rests father's hat on his head, and the family leaves.

The corpse in Liz Hughes' film is, of course, oblivious to the trouble his body is facing in occupying a space in consumer capitalism. The film provides a neat anecdote for Harvey's approach toward understanding urban development as representation. "Space," he has said, "is produced in the image of capital."²⁴ What is interesting also is the role of the wife and mother, whose search for a space for her husband's corpse is reminiscent of

the role of a window shopper, looking for a position to occupy. The window shopper, without money, is denied the occupation of her/his desired role and thus consciously turns to the only occupiable space in which desire can be temporarily gratified - the fictioning space, in this case the cinema.

Judy Wajcam speaks of the spatial constitution of power, that is, the ability of the spatial allocation of goods, services and employment across a city to act as hidden mechanisms for the unequal distribution of income among various groups in the urban population.²⁵ *The Cat's Cradle* illustrates the lack of spatial power that a particular social group can encounter beneath economic subjugation. Position is denied both in the public space of the parks, and in the instruments of industry. Wajcam goes on to discuss the large-scale state intervention after the second world war, which through the instrument of the housing market, ensured that the single-family household became the dominant form of housing.²⁶ In *The Cat's Cradle*, the low income family shares a single room with several other families. Their right to occupy burial space is therefore already negated because of their inability to subscribe to the suburban way of life.

And so this family has only the space of fiction to turn to in order be provided with an acceptable, even if purely temporary, occupiable space. The reason why this is so might be the same as the reasoning which causes many of us to occupy the space of the shopping mall. As Mary Yelanjian has said:

Shopping centres...provide space for corporate-produced cultural images/objects that stand in the way of our more diverse desires; they provide a space for us to exercise choice as we gaze at similar products; they provide a space that helps us negotiate with a system of power which we can no longer grasp and attack.²⁷

Yelanjian touches on something importantly ambiguous when she speaks of a space that *helps us negotiate* and yet one in which we cannot actually exert great control. For this is the function of popular fiction on a broad level (and by 'popular fiction', I refer to advertising and display as much as to the cinema and the written word.) It is through this popular fiction that we can contemplate, and negotiate with our day to day life. According to Kroker, Kroker and Cook,

...the political stability of the suburbs comes from the large number of cloned, constituted spaces such as plazas, which ensure that the organism will replicate and be preserved. The genotype is easily recognisable through the sequencing of fast food restaurants, car dealerships, gas bars, carpet outlets and discount stores.²⁸

The attraction and stability of such structures, all instrumental in sustaining the fictioning continuum, is only partly to do with the power struggle of which Yelanjian speaks. The tension and strength of this struggle between producers and consumers stems from the fact that ownership is presently the only form of control legitimised in our culture.²⁹ And yet, there is something more to the stability and success of architecture as fiction than an economic struggle.

David Chaney touches on this 'something' when he compares the experience of the contemporary shopping mall to the early development of the railway line. The first travellers on trains, looking out of their carriage window, experienced a multiplicity of sensation, a panoramic perception, which

in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects, the traveller saw the objects, landscapes etc., *through* the apparatus which moved him through the world.³⁰

This is immediately reminiscent of Foucault's discussion of the heterotopia in postmodernist fiction, "where a large number of fragmentary possible orders glitter separately in the same dimension."³¹ McHale speaks of such postmodern heterotopias as radically disrupting geographic continuity.³² And yet, he later concedes that

There is a sense in which the worlds of the (heterotopian) zone *do*, in most cases, occupy the same *kind* of space. That is, they all belong to the projected space of the fictional universe, the space concretized by the readers in the process of reading the text.³³

I would suggest that the fictioning continuum proclaimed in the suburban shopping mall, and in so many other aspects of day to day life *is* a kind of heterotopian zone. The movement of the consumer through the mall forms a narrative journey, and in many ways we do see the world, as the early train traveller did, *through* this apparatus that surrounds us. Therefore we are able to exist in an 'impossible' space, a space projected by fiction.

It is not surprising therefore, that the representation of space in *The Cat's Cradle* turns in on itself, creating a kind of aporia, in Barthes sense, an infinitely impossible meta-fictional space.³⁴ At the conclusion to the film, the deserted corpse is joined by another cinema goer. This new viewer sits beside the corpse and eats a box of popcorn as she stares contentedly at the screen. After a few moments, unaware of her companion's state of rigor mortis, she leans her head against the stranger's shoulder. Because of the nature of this final shot, a special relationship is set up between the viewers of *The Cat's Cradle* and the characters in the film. The camera is set up from the point of view of the cinema screen in the fictional cinema. Effectively this means that the film's real viewers are directly facing the fictional viewers (the corpse and his new companion). We are merely viewing one another, thus suspended in a very unusual space. It is the projected space of

the fictional world, a space concretized only by the respective viewers. Thus the unoccupiable and discontinuous space previously represented in the city park and the steelworks, ends with a different kind of confrontation, where space remains discontinuous but is strangely occupiable.

Conscious of its own medium, the film thus behaves as a discussion not just of narrative space but of the whole process of the composition and reception of the fictional text. The woman who joins the corpse accepts her role as cinema viewer too easily, without even looking effectively at the person beside her. Her cool sense of bliss is disturbing to the viewer of *The Cat's Cradle*. The ending effectively strips us of our preconceptions of viewer, film, fiction.

The Cat's Cradle is therefore very much about an awareness of this self-defining, self-referential nature of the fictioning continuum. And such a self-defining vortex poses many problems. If our experience of day to day life exists only in our very own heterotopian world, how can we negotiate with others? Can we ever get out of our train carriage and exist in the world we see through the fictioning continuum? If there is "no place else to go," where does the community or the neighbourhood exist?

As this chapter has demonstrated, there is a strong relationship between the structure and organisation of the contemporary shopping mall and the structure and organisation of the fictioning continuum. One is dependent upon the other. Deconstructing the mall, we are able to look more closely at the nature of simulacra as a day to day experience. Increasingly, contemporary Australian fiction such as *The Cat's Cradle*, is able to deal with the shortcomings of such "impossible worlds", and enlighten us as viewers, sitting still in our armchairs. One of those shortcomings which *The Cat's Cradle* has illustrated outstandingly, is the possibility for the existence of community, bedraggled

though it might be, outside of the world of economic rationalism and consumer desire. This is the basis of the next chapter.

¹ Vitto Acconci (1992), "Frames for Life: The Public Organisation of Private Experience", *Art & Text*, 42, p. 82.

² Stephen Heath (1990), "When Millicent Bucked and Writhed", *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production and Meaning*, Ed. Tony Bennett, London: Routledge, p.46.

³ As cited by Margaret A. Rose (1991), *The Postmodern and the Post Industrial: a critical analysis*, London: Cambridge U.P., p.175.

⁴ Barry Judith (1991), *Public Fantasy*, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, n.p.

⁵ Acconci (1992), p.10.

⁶ Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor (1978) *Escape Attempts: The Theory & Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life* Harmondsworth: Penguin, n.p.

⁷ For a more detailed discussion of this subject see Chapter Four; questions of the contemporary "I".

⁸ John Fiske (1989), *Reading the Popular*, Sydney : Unwin Hyman, p.10. It is interesting to consider Fiske's use of violence in language: 'victory', 'tactics', 'series of wounds'. It could be argued that such phallogocentric usage serves to obscure other, more subtle and ambiguous levels of meaning, and those levels of discourse unable to be expressed through violence.

⁹ David Chaney (1990), "Subtopia in Gateshead: The Metro Centre as a Cultural Form", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7(4), p.49 & p.52.

¹⁰ Umberto Eco (1990), "Small Worlds", *The Limits of Interpretation*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., p.75.

¹¹ Tracey C. Davis (1991) points toward the prototype of the early enclosed urban arcade, particularly The Exeter 'Change in late seventeenth century London. This was developed as a cluster of trinket shops for the wealthy, in which theatre and shopping were amalgamated. In the eighteenth century the arcade's upper floor featured waxworks, displays of action goods and one-person performances. See "Theatrical Antecedents for the Mall That Ate Downtown", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 24(4), Ohio: Modern Languages Assoc. of America, p.7.

¹² Davis (1991), p.4.

¹³ Zoe Sofia, (1990) "Spacing Out in the Mother Shop", *No Substitute*, Perth: Freemantle Arts Centre Press, p.140.

¹⁴ Sofia (1990), p.135.

¹⁵ Meaghan Morris (1988), "Things to do with Shopping Centres", *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*. Ed. S. Sheridan. London: Verso, p.203.

¹⁶ Dolezel (1988) as cited in Eco (1990), p.74.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard (1986), *America*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, p.29.

¹⁸ Anders Gunther Die (1982), "Haus gelieferte Welt," an article written in 1956 appearing in the catalogue Kunst und Medien, Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin & Bunderverband Bildender Künstler Bom, p61. As cited by Rob Perrée (1988), *Into Video Art*, Rotterdam/Amsterdam: Con Rumore, p.30.

¹⁹ Baudrillard (1986), p.29.

²⁰ We frequently cannot tell how parodic or straight forward Baudrillard is being; we are constantly having to check up on whether we are reading in the same code as he is writing in. A function of this confusion may be to challenge the reader to the task of interpretation; being so focussed on this code performs a metalingual function. Rose (1979) proposes that "If fiction may sometimes be used as a meta-linguistic means of refunctioning standard speech, the parodistic meta-fiction may perhaps be characterised as a 'tertiary' form of meta-language." For more information see her chapter "Parody as Meta-fiction" in *Parody/Metafiction*, Croom Helm: London, pp.61-105.

²¹ Jean Baudrillard (1983), *Simulations*, New York: Semiotext(e), p.152.

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- 22 William S. Burroughs, *The Exterminator*, n.p., n. pag.
- 23 *The Cat's Cradle*. Written and directed by Liz Hughes, Melbourne: Swinburne Film and Television School, 1991.
- 24 David Harvey, as cited without footnote by Rosalyn Deutsche (1992), "City Fathers", *Art & Text*, 42, p.62.
- 25 Wajcam Judy (1991), *Feminism Confronts Technology*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p.119/ 20.
- 26 Wajcam (1991), p. 114/5.
- 27 Mary Yelanjian (1991) "Rhythms of Consumption", *Cultural Studies*, 5(1), p.96.
- 28 Arthur Kroker, Marilouise Kroker and David Cook (1989), *Panic Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Postmodern Scene*, New York: St Martin's Press, p.213.
- 29 Williamson (1986), *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture*, London: Marion Boyars, p.231.
- 30 W. Schivelbusch (1986) *The Railway Journey*, London: Berg., p.64. As cited by David Chaney (1990), p. 54.
- 31 Foucault as cited by Brian McHale (1987), *Postmodernist Fiction*, New York: Methuen, p.44.
- 32 McHale (1987), p.50.
- 33 McHale (1987), p.56.
- 34 This use of the term 'aporia' comes from Raman Selden (1989), who in reference to Roland Barthes (1968), says "In realising that any meta-language could be put in the position of a first order language and interrogated by another meta-language, Barthes glimpsed an infinite regress (an aporia), which destroys the authority of all meta-languages...we can never step outside discourse and adopt a position invulnerable to a subsequent interrogative reading." Selden (1989), "Post Structuralist Theories", *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.78., in reference to Barthes (1968), *Elements of Semiology*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang.

Chapter Two

Structure and Neighbourhood:

Shoppingtown



(Mega-malls)...are so powerful that they overwhelm everything else -
there is nothing strong enough to balance them...towns disappear.

K.W. Kowinski ³⁵

Shopping malls are lonely places...The shopping mall is one place you
can go, get a cup of coffee, and be with people without actual contact.

Kroker, Kroker & Cooke ³⁶

Loneliness. Spectacle. Loss. How much can a privately owned public space be responsible for the non-economic aspects of community and neighbourhood? As the large shopping malls consume increasingly large amounts of space in both long-standing central business districts and in the skirting bushland of new suburbs, what happens to the concept of the local? How much does the fictioning continuum inside the structure of the mall provide for interactions of a personal level?

This chapter will look particularly at a short film by David Caesar appropriately titled *Shoppingtown*.³⁷ The title is of course taken from the shopping mall chain "Westfields". It is an interesting self-professed title for a mall-chain, particularly in the light of Kowinski's proposal that with the coming of the mall, whole towns disappear. Presumably by 'whole towns,' Kowinski is speaking not just of land and architecture, but of all that the word 'town' implies - namely, community.

In his provocative article "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion: The Creation of Social Worlds in an American Shopping Mall," George Lewis begins by considering notions of community. In his searching for a definition of the word, Lewis cites Jessie Bernard:

Bernard makes a crucial conceptual distinction...between 'the community' which emphasises *locale* as its most important and fundamental criterion, and 'community'

which emphasises *commonalities* and *interaction* as significant criteria in its conceptualisation.³⁸

In speaking of local shopping malls, we might suppose that people use the mall because of *locale*. But this becomes too simple a logic when we consider the nature of discontinuous space and architecture as fiction as looked at in the last chapter. According to the fictional space of advertising and display, each mall user may occupy a completely different 'possible world' to the person beside her/him. While *interaction* generally takes place in economic terms, non-economic *commonalities* may be few and far between. Presumably, when we consider the observation made by Kroker, Kroker and Cooke, cited in the opening to this chapter, we could not substitute the word 'communities' for 'shopping malls'. Traditionally, communities are not lonely places.

What is interesting about these ideas in the context of the shopping mall as opposed to a cultural centre such as a designated community or town hall is that we are talking about a space which is spatially designed and run according to the prerequisites and the interests of one corporate body. Businesses themselves are not allowed to flourish without the stringent controls of a central management that has a clear idea of its own production/consumption calendar.

The predominantly retail space of the mall sets up a very different set of relations to the former play of the city, the town, the community. The nature of this is closely related to the type of play Elizabeth Ferrier notes:

In a department store it is possible to wander through privately owned space, holding or wearing someone else's property as if it were your own, without asking to do so, often without even having to go through the usual social intercourse appropriate to being a guest in someone's place. Boundaries between public and private become ambiguous.³⁹

This kind of leisure, where basic communication requirements for face to face social relations can be almost entirely avoided, is perhaps one of the primary contributing reasons why 'whole towns' disappear. Anonymity is not only possible, but to great extents, encouraged. Kowinski in "The Malling of America" has made the valid observation that parades, bands, the appearance of children's television personalities and other such 'community' kind of events at the local mall, are generally entirely manufactured.⁴⁰ These events fit into the management's overall plan of recruiting custom. Mary Yelanjian looks to periodicals published by retail management bodies in the United States and finds further evidence of such decision making. In a mall that is being used for live performances by area cultural groups, for local telethons, and as a site for cable television programming, the management explains their justification:

The mall has to be fun, it has to be so that when people ask 'What are we going to do on Saturday?' they'll answer 'We'll go to the mall and have lunch'...hopefully that's the time the merchant's windows are so appealing & enticing that they will buy".⁴¹

Later, in the same *Chain Store Executive* article, a management member observes, "we are trying to transcend the idea that people have to go other places for leisure."⁴² This leisure is one in which we can be fictionally and not necessarily actively involved. Watching a 'community' event on the centre stage, we can engage in just the same kind of viewing as we do when we window shop. Shopping malls do in fact call forth the same psychological position as TV watching - that of voyeurism.⁴³ George Lewis concludes his article on community in American shopping malls by stating that "having the *perception* of a community, doesn't mean that one actually exists."⁴⁴

David Caesar's short film, *Shoppingtown*, sheds some light on the nature of the community as construct, particularly in the Australian context. The film is set in the Westfield Shoppingtown at Parramatta in Western Sydney. Whilst it has been labelled as a documentary, I would argue that film's very structure sets itself up to be viewed

as fiction. This is so particularly because of the way in which it foregrounds people as willing subjects, or characters, within the mall's fictioning continuum.

Shoppingtown immediately rejects the conventions of realist filmmaking by separating auditory from visual narrative. The film's opening consists of an auditory dialogue over an empty black screen. The voices we hear are explaining the answer to a question we are not directly asked. As the narrative progresses, we can speculate that the question given to these voices was "What makes you happy?" The answers we hear are not interrupted by the voice of the filmmakers. Rather, they are edited together therefore cutting one another off: "going out, getting pissed/oh I don't know/yeah goin' out/hangin' out with me mates." We can ascertain from the background noise that these people are being interviewed inside the shopping mall.

And then we can see. The rest of the film is predominantly taken up with the visual portraits of stationary figures. The sound we hear is a low hum, a white noise that is clearly not the true surrounding atmospheric sound. We can see the slightly out of focus shopping mall behind each portrait figure, a background alive with colour and passers by. The people in the foreground, however, sometimes alone and sometimes in small groups of two or three, stare silently and with little body movement, directly at the camera. As a viewer, this means we become very aware of the camera as an instrument for our own gaze. Often it seems the subjects are glaring directly at the viewer alone. This may have the effect, as it did when I screened only a small section of the film at a recent postgraduate conference, of making certain viewers extremely uncomfortable.⁴⁵

Shoppingtown's narrative technique disorients and disarms us as viewers. It also highlights the sense of alienation that the subjects before the camera or microphone might experience as consumers. The film is able to highlight the isolation of these mall goers from their immediate environment in a way that says that these people, this

shopping place and this experience of disconnectedness could exist anywhere. The subjects' relation to their shopping place is fragile and temporary.

Westfield Parramatta exists within a suburb where the majority of local residents live in low socio-economic circumstances. Many of the subjects who stand before the camera in *Shoppingtown* are youths. There is also a reasonable percentage of young mothers. We might presume, according to the boredom with which the film's subjects face their immediate environment, that they are locals, that is, they are regular visitors to Westfield Parramatta.

It is worth pausing here to consider William Pressdee's study of unemployed youth in Elizabeth, a suburb of Adelaide that in many ways has the same relationship to Adelaide as Parramatta has to Sydney. Elizabeth is an outlying centre made up of a large percentage of government housing estates and an unusually high unemployment rate amongst local youth. According to Pressdee, eighty percent of unemployed people in Elizabeth visited the local shopping mall at least once a week and nearly one hundred percent of young unemployed women were regular visitors.⁴⁶ He states:

Thursday nights vibrated with youth eager to show themselves:- it (the mall) belongs to them, they have possessed it. This cultural response...(revolves)...around the possession of space, or to be more precise, the possession of consumer space where their very presence challenges, offends and resists.⁴⁷

One might be critical of the comparisons here, and protest that the situation for unemployed youth in a mall in Elizabeth, South Australia, has no bearing on one in Parramatta, New South Wales. Meaghan Morris in fact warns against such generalisation in her own article on "Things To Do with Shopping Centres", where she stresses the importance of researching locally, and from one's own personal experience as a mall user.⁴⁸ Despite this, I cannot deny interest in the fact that whilst I research in my own domain of Sydney and surrounding suburbs, I am astounded at

the *sameness* of my own findings, to those of other researchers in other locations in Australia and also Canada, America and the U.K. Everywhere, it seems, there is this struggle for community resistance to shopping mall management on the part of a bored local youth culture. John Fiske speaks of youths that "consumed images instead of commodities, a kind of sensuous consumption that did not create profit."⁴⁹ Looking distinctly at community aspects of the mall in America, Lewis observes this same youth culture and says of it:

Mall management does not like to see such groups develop. They use mall space for other than economic purposes. These warm knots of community can and do disrupt the cool smooth flow of economic transaction. Group members take seats designed for shoppers. They create a focus on the mall that is not economic in nature.....They are aware of their status in the eyes of management and attempt, each in their own distinctive way, to keep a low profile so their presence is tolerated. ⁵⁰

In David Caesar's film, it is the attention he pays to the subculture of a specific mall that highlights the universality of this same kind of placelessness. The mall might be well mapped and intimately known by its regular users, but it is never really fully occupiable. Historically, according to Alvin Toffler, both distance and the significance of particular places to individuals have never meant much less.⁵¹ The ideology of the fictioning continuum works to subordinate the local as unique place, developing a 'sameness' in youth culture worldwide.

George Lewis blames the high turnover, volume of persons and transience that is a part of any mall design, wherever its location, for their inability to sustain any real community sense. The illusion of community, he says,

...is a shared illusion - neither management nor shoppers are fooled by it, but both can *pretend* that they are creating or engaging in the meaningful and socially necessary relations of community.⁵²

This shared illusion may be the same as Benedict Anderson's thesis that whole nations are "imagined communities". Our sense of national community is intimately bound up with our complete confidence in the steady, anonymous, simultaneous existence of people we will never actually have any first hand knowledge of.⁵³

Meaghan Morris speaks of the use of garden settings in the main plaza areas of shopping malls, as working to produce a sense of 'setting' that defines "an imaginary coherence of public space in Australia."⁵⁴ In reference to Green Hills shopping centre in Maitland she elaborates:

a garden centre aesthetic that not only makes all centres seem the same, but through a play of echoing spatial analogy, makes shopping centres seem like a range of other sites consecrated to the performance of family life, to women's work, to women's work in leisure: shoppingtown, beer garden, picnic spot, used car yard (with bunting), scenic lookout, town garden, public park, suburban backyard.⁵⁵

The mall is thus able to work in the same way that Anderson suggests the newspaper does, creating some extraordinary mass ceremony that results in the almost simultaneous consumption (imagining) of the culture as community.⁵⁶ Caesar's film is notable for its deconstruction of this imagining. The use of white noise as atmospheric sound completely undermines the structure of a shopping mall's sound design. In the same way as Morris refers to the garden setting as defining an imaginary coherence, so does Jacques Attali reveal shopping centre Muzak to be an elaborately designed tool for supposed social cohesion:

Make people believe. The entire history of tonal music, like that of classical political economy, amounts to an attempt to make people believe in a consensual representation of the world...In order to stamp upon spectators the faith that there is harmony in order. In order to etch into their minds the image of the ultimate social cohesion.⁵⁷

In *Shoppingtown*, Caesar's use of white noise comes to a point when he interrupts the 'still' portraits of Westfield users to display a rapid montage of television advertising visuals. The sound of consumer advertising is notably absent. Anne Rosenfield in a paper aptly titled "The Beautiful Disturber" tells us

A study by Ronald Millman at Loyola University showed that a supermarket's receipts were 38.2% higher when slow, easy listening music 'wafted through the aisles' than when similar fast paced music was played. When questioned at the store's exit, one third of shoppers in the store at the time of the study did not know whether music had been played, and 29% flatly denied its presence.⁵⁸

Together, the organisation of space through architecture and design, and sound through easy listening music, create the ordering force of the shopping centre as a fictionally coherent community. The calculated disruption of this kind of 'wafting through the aisles' sound in *Shoppingtown* works to expose this 'coherence'. The film's visual images are accompanied merely by the sound of emptiness. Actually a sound recording taken from the hum of a refrigerator, this continuous audio works to emphasise fragmentation and thus alienate.

As well as this deconstructive use of sound, Caesar dismantles the image. It is as if there are people rather than objects on the supermarket shelves; faces for us to select or discard. Consumers themselves have become fragments in the mall's grand design. Interestingly fragmentation at the level of consumer choice can contribute to the same kind of cultural normalisation as Muzak:

Controllers of capital hope that the consumer will shuffle through the store aisles past the brand names that signify acceptance into consumer society without confronting the actual inane nature of the choices that they are asked to make. Faced with endless

choices, the consumer is distracted from the fact that multinationals control each one of those choices.⁵⁹

There is some tension then, between the existence of fragmentation as a tool of consumerism and contemporary multinational capitalism, and the use of fragmentation in contemporary art and narrative. Caesar's positioning of people as the 'endless choices' available in consumerism, deliberately uses narrative fragmentation to deconstruct fragmentation of a wider kind. But fragmentation as a tool in postmodern art has been heavily criticised, particularly by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. In a review of this controversial book, Rosalyn Deutsche takes a critical approach to Harvey. She paraphrases his thesis here:

Since the dispersal, mobility, decentralisation and flexibility of advanced capitalism - all of which produce experiences of time-space compression - only disguise the tightening organisation and increasing global penetration of capital, and since culture mirrors this experience, it follows that postmodern art's interest in "image creation" participates in the concealment of underlying reality. Such art, in Harvey's view, disguises the ultimate reality - the interconnected totality of capitalism.⁶⁰

I would argue along with Deutsche, and against David Harvey, that there is a place for the use of the same tools of representation in postmodern art as we find in the very vessels for capital such as the suburban mall. David Caesar's disconnection of our time-space (audio and visual) experience of the mall and the representation of this in a non-linear fragmented narrative, works to successfully undermine the 'ultimate reality' of which Harvey speaks. This 'ultimate reality' - the interconnected totality of capitalism - is the same as the fictioning continuum of which Stephen Heath has spoken. We could say that in this sense, *Shoppingtown* behaves meta-fictionally, drawing attention to not just its own filmic, image based medium, but the fictional

nature of the imagined community. This is particularly so because of the film's blurring of conventional documentary and fiction categories.

Boris Frankel, in his discussion of community in post-industrialism, associates fragmentation with "particularism" and "separatism" as apposed to "a sense of belonging, of citizenship, of common rights and responsibilities."⁶¹ Both Frankel and David Harvey have highlighted the way in which consumer capitalism is able to use fragmentation and pluralism as a powerful force in consumer integration and cultural homogenisation, whilst maintaining the illusion of coherence. Both assess fragmentation and interdisciplinarity as opposing openness and promoting closure on complex and comprehensive levels. Harvey convicts postmodernism for concerning:

...the medium (money) rather than the message (social labour), the emphasis on fiction rather than function, on signs rather than things, on aesthetics rather than transformation of the role of money as Marx depicts it.⁶²

I would argue that, for the creators of narrative works, an interest in the politics of representation is integral. Fictional narratives are about representation. When the object to be represented is contemporary consumer capital, such as it is in *Shoppingtown*, then an investigation into the complexity of representations that make up contemporary reality, would naturally reflect on the narrative structure of the film. This does not mean that *Shoppingtown* rejects the message for the medium, the object for the sign, the role of money for aesthetics. Rather, it is investigating precisely, the lack of sense of community of which Frankel speaks. It is partly through the deft employment of narrative fragmentation and the foregrounding of image, both tools of consumer capital themselves, that *Shoppingtown* succeeds in exposing assumptions.

The 'imagined' community that *Shoppingtown* deconstructs is that which relies on commonalities and interactions of an economic sense. It is because of consumerisms

'imagined coherence', that the unemployed youth of Elizabeth occupy the same kind of space as those at Westfield Parramatta and those at my own 'local', Westfield Miranda. Therefore the actual local community in *Shoppingtown* is represented as disconnected and unable to speak. The global penetration of this 'disconnectedness from the local' becomes obvious when we hear Davis' comments on West Edmonton Mall in Canada. There, the mall in question is so large and fantastic, it is a tourist attraction in its own right:

With or without a Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United States, ideology passes without tariff across the longest undefended border in the world. If the West Edmonton mall was truly a locally owned and conceived wonder it would reflect the ethnic Edmonton, incorporate native Canadian people's culture..and would not generate so much antagonism in its host city. Whether a visitor's nationality is German, Japanese or Canadian, there is no need to question identity or strip away ethnocentrism: its universalism is a fantasy of America which, in Suburbia, generates no distance between the West Edmonton Mall and all of our cultures.⁶³

In the Australian context, the existence of the primary interactive ties that make up community are not to be found within the privately owned space of the shopping mall. Nevertheless, possibilities for reinstating cultural differences and for interrupting the image of the ultimate social cohesion as portrayed through consumer capital are given much needed attention in contemporary narratives such as *Shoppingtown*. Contemporary Australian fiction is one medium which is succeeding in being able to depict and define the non-economic beneath the global web of consumerism. Frequently a meta-fictional and self-conscious narrative language needs to be spoken in order to obstruct the 'imagined' community and capitulate the local and the different into existence.

³⁵ K.W. Kowinski (1978), "The Mall of America", *New Times*, 10(9), p. 47.

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- ³⁶ Kroker, Kroker and Cooke (1989), p. 210.
- ³⁷ *Shoppingtown*. Directed by David Caesar. Sydney: Australian Film Television and Radio School, 1986. All further references are to the same production.
- ³⁸ George H. Lewis (1990), "Community Through Exclusion and Illusion: The Creation of Social Worlds in an American Shopping Mall", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 24(2), p. 123.
- ³⁹ Elizabeth Ferrier (1987), p. 2. For a more detailed discussion on the ambiguous relationship between public and private 'boundaries' in the mall, see Chapter Three of this thesis.
- ⁴⁰ K.W. Kowinski (1985), *The Mall of America*, New York: Morrow, p. 6.
- ⁴¹ Mary Yelanjian (1991), "Rhythms of Consumption", *Cultural Studies*, 5(1), p. 91, in reference to "Priority One: Keeping Au Courant", *Chain Store Age Executive*, May 1985, p. 62, and also "Willow Grove Park's Roller Coaster Begins to Level Off" *Chain Store Executive*, May 1985, p. 130-2.
- ⁴² Yelanjian (1991), p. 92., in citing "Priority One: Keeping Au Courant", *Chainstore Age Executive*, May 1985, p. 62.
- ⁴³ Kroker, Kroker & Cook (1989), p. 208.
- ⁴⁴ George H. Lewis (1990), p. 123.
- ⁴⁵ At the School of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, Postgraduate Seminar in 1992, two audience members spoke to me after my presentation about the effect that *Shoppingtown* had on them. They both felt intimidated and uncomfortable with looking at the portrait figures as well as being 'looked at' by the same subjects. In both cases this resulted in the viewers having to look periodically away from the video screen, therefore further interrupting the already fragmented narrative.
- ⁴⁶ Pressdee (1986) "Agony or Ecstasy: Broken Transitions and the New Social State of Working-Class Youth in Australia." Occasional Papers, South Australian Centre for Youth Studies, S. A. College of Advances Education, Magill, S.A., p. 13.
- ⁴⁷ Pressdee (1986), p. 14.
- ⁴⁸ Morris (1988), pp. 194-196.
- ⁴⁹ Fiske (1989), p. 16-17.
- ⁵⁰ Lewis (1990), p. 134-5.
- ⁵¹ Alvin Toffler (1974), *Future Shock*, London: Pan Books.
- ⁵² Lewis (1990), p. 133.
- ⁵³ Benedict Anderson (1990), "Apprehensions of Time", *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Meaning*. Ed. Tony Bennett. London: Routledge, p. 72.
- ⁵⁴ Morris (1990), p. 220.
- ⁵⁵ Morris (1990), p. 219.
- ⁵⁶ Anderson (1990), p. 78.
- ⁵⁷ Jacques Attali (1985) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 46.
- ⁵⁸ Anne H. Rosenfield (1985) "Music: The Beautiful Disturber", *Psychology Today*, Dec 1985, p. 56.
- ⁵⁹ Yelanjian (1991), p. 94.
- ⁶⁰ Deutsche (1992), p. 59.
- ⁶¹ Boris Frankel (1987) *The Post Industrial Utopians*, London: Basil Blackwell Ltd., p. 182.
- ⁶² Frankel (1987), p. 184.
- ⁶³ Davis (1991), p. 12/13.

Chapter Three

Structure and Difference: Language from Consumerism



The window shopper searches for a visual vocabulary from which to make statements about herself and her social relations. Looking is as much a means of exerting social control as speaking.

John Fiske ⁶⁴

Given that differences of a cultural, local or political nature are excluded from the image of a cohesive community as portrayed through consumer capital, this chapter concentrates particularly on the struggle for voicing such difference. Consumerism has been spoken of as behaving as a kind of language, and one whose primary 'users' and/or 'audience' is women. This chapter questions the ability for consumerism to behave as an empowering language for women and consequently argues against notions of engendered public space, deconstructing the idea that the shopping mall is a women's domain. The course of the argument examines the writing of John Fiske in conjunction with a piece of short fiction by Gig Ryan contained in the Sybilla Press anthology, *Second Degree Tampering*.⁶⁵ What becomes obvious from Gig Ryan's writing is a struggle with consumer 'language' as construct. It is a construct which Fiske does little to displace. The work of Gig Ryan demonstrates that, as with the filmmaker, the contemporary short fiction writer is faced with the task of completely redressing consumer discourse in order to subvert the workings of consumer capitalism. It is a task which involves finding new ways of speaking through, and beyond, the 'ultimate reality' - the fictioning continuum - of consumerism.

As already mentioned, much theoretical writing on consumerism makes some reference to the idea that women are the primary audience to which shopping malls are directed. John Fiske is not alone in focussing on women as fulfilling this role. David Chaney examines the emergence of a target consumer audience historically:

Intrinsic to this culture of display in which the illusion of participation and gratification has continually to be exaggerated is the appeal of advertising, and it is appropriate that there was an enormous expansion of advertising with the culture of consumerism and that department stores were amongst the leaders in the style and degree of advertising they commissioned. It is also significant that the audience to which this advertising was principally directed was the "new", in terms of public address, audience of women.⁶⁶

Yet feminist theorists such as Meaghan Morris and Zoe Sofia do not take this as a given, and more often demonstrate some objection, in the very base of their work, to the acceptance of such gender specifics. Sofia suggests that positing the role of consumerism as a defining one for women, obscures other levels and types of consumption, particularly that practiced by resource consuming multinational corporations.⁶⁷ Morris emphasises the danger of constructing "exemplary allegorical figures" if such figures are taken to refer to some model of the "empirical social user" of shopping facilities and centres. Such generalisations says Morris, remain abstractions for concrete reasons.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, John Fiske's discussion of consumerism frequently refers to the user as female alone. Fiske, whose language and topics alike are inextricably bound up with the politics of power, sees the consumer's moment of choice as "an empowered moment." Consumption, he says, offers some means of control over the context of everyday life. This is so because of the power consumerism allows us in constructing the "communal meanings of oneself and social relations".⁶⁹ While Fiske acknowledges that, in a sense, all cultures value goods for cultural meanings that go beyond their utilitarian function, he goes on to insist that the way that we consume goods under contemporary consumer capitalism can speak for and about us to an extent which is historically unequalled.⁷⁰ Fiske cites Douglas and Isherwood, who tell us that "consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked

into shape" and that "goods are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture."⁷¹ He also cites Judith Williamson:

The conscious chosen meaning in most people's lives comes more from what they consume than what they produce.⁷²

Certainly, in contemporary Australia, we are rarely given such a broad range of choices in the production or career field, as we are given as consumers. I would argue, however, that Williamson's statement, which Fiske endorses, seems justified only in terms of economics. The production on a personal level of goods and services that are frequently immeasurable in economic terms - such as parenthood, housework, visual arts, music performance, sport, leisure, sewing, gardening, carpentry, the keeping of diaries, as well as the sustainment of family and community support networks - might contain much more social meaning than the contents of the weekly receipts. As well as this, the consumption of goods and services is an action that is easily observed, whereas the production of goods and services at home or in a community capacity are not always obvious. On a similar level, arts and writing in contemporary Australia might escape, even reject, the simple production/consumption curves of economic measurement. The social meaning content to come from art's production, would generally outway the value contained in the raw materials bought in anticipation of an end.

Nevertheless, Fiske continues to emphasise consumerism as a language of power in contemporary Australia, and the role of the consumer as a defining one for women. The basis of this idea that consumerism is language is that commodities behave as goods to think with and to speak with. Fiske does concede that the power derived from this 'consumer language' is, in part, a promotional initiative on the part of retailers. The deliberate display of abundant consumer choice in the mall plays an

integral part in constructing consumerism as language, and therefore sustaining the illusion of consumption as empowering:

Because style and taste have, according to this capitalist myth, no role in a communist system that denies its people the language of commodities...It is therefore essential for capitalist shopping centres to emphasise the plenitude of commodities.⁷³

Let us look back however, to a point touched on in the previous chapter about pluralism and fragmentation. Harvey has proposed that interdisciplinarity is no guarantee of openness. More often, he concedes, it constitutes closure at new, more comprehensive levels.⁷⁴ If we were to actually try and visualise consumer choice as empowerment through language, we might imagine a shopping mall filled with word shops - cheap words, imported words, complicated and expensive words, and all, as we are told, principally directed at an audience of women: "public conveniences, free buses, parking, toilets, entertainment, free samples, competitions. In the shoppingtown women have access to public space without the stigma or threat of the street." ⁷⁵

My point is related to the analyses of Foucault, Derrida and Barthes, and to countless numbers of feminist theorists who have frequently objected that language is not an opaque, nor an inert material. Language is an ideological construction. For women, as Frances Jaffer interjects:

...how can you deconstruct a language you never constructed or it was never constructed by others like you, or with you in mind? ⁷⁶

Of course Francis Jaffer's point in case here is written and spoken language. But the language of consumerism is again, one constructed largely by multinationals and the dollar value. For women, the language of consumerism is perhaps all the more

problematic because advertising, and theorists such as John Fiske, tell us that the shopping audience is frequently gendered female, and therefore constructed *with* women in mind.

Television culture has long been labelled as having created its own language. Television as language harbours much the same complexities and contradictions of consumerism as language. Sean Cubbitt rejects the kinds of languages that have been manufactured under consumerism, when he insists that television manufactures invisibility:

Television's categories of invisibility are necessarily bound up with its production of visibility: the programmes and adverts that we see are the tip of the iceberg of what we don't see: because TV is too all pervasive to be seen in toto, because some programmes never get shown, because some programmes never get made.⁷⁷

If we apply Cubbitt's ideas on television to the shopping mall, it becomes obvious that the mall too, is able to manufacture invisibility. The language it provides is incomplete. On malls and their readability, Meaghan Morris has this to say:

...readability may be minimal indeed: many centres operate a strategy of alternating surprise and confusion with familiarity and harmony; and in different parts of any one centre, clarity and opacity will occur in different degrees of intensity for different users.⁷⁸

With this in mind, let us turn to the work of Gig Ryan, who is included in the anthology *Second Degree Tampering*, with a piece of prose fiction titled "What a Waste".(47-50) The piece is set within a work space, where the persona keeps her "wiry taxless stressless job" on a floor described as an "open plan office like a cemetery". Although the reader is not given any continuous realist narrative, it is easy

to ascertain that the office block is part of a tower that itself joins to a shopping centre.

At lunch time:

The bland shopping centre heat slaps against your head, the flat blue cloudless sky hangs behind the square white outline of the complex. I walk around and around it...(49)

To walk around and around the structure of the built environment is to contemplate it. In many ways, this is the same contemplativeness with which Gig Ryan approaches language. The structure of the building seems impermeable, but so is the day to day existence inside it. The office politics involve patronising male bosses and a situation where the other workers lap up opportunities for sexual, financial and hierarcic office power. What is interesting here is the infiltration of consumer language into the office space. If consumerism is a defining role for women, then it shows up in "What a Waste" as a definition that infiltrates and obstructs. It provides the persona with a language that, in the context of the office, doesn't seem appropriate or entirely functional:

The smell of dissipated energy, of despair, smothering its giftshop hand over you. (47)

...his blue eyes picked in his red skin which had waited also to be paid attention like a receipt, to exist. I wrap up his cashed words in a mane of silence...(49)

Ms Valencia Ivory Psalter v.i.p.s around wagging her skirt eyelids over her dumbfound eyes....she nervily generously trolleys out to me...(50)

Gig Ryan thus demonstrates the way in which the world of consumerism pervades women's discourse. Williamson proposes that consumerism as a subversive language involves the meanings and uses of goods being appropriated and turned around on the society which produces them.⁷⁹ Gig Ryan attempts a resistance with words, rather

than the consumer products themselves. But the subtleties and complexities of Ryan's writing open up contradictions that do not seem to have been adequately dealt with in much theoretical writing on consumerism. Mica Niva, for example, proposes that

Consumption (as a feature of modern capitalism) has offered women new areas of authority and expertise, new sources of income, a new sense of consumer rights; and one of the consequences of these developments has been a heightened awareness of entitlement outside the sphere of consumption (which may well have contributed to the conditions for the emergence of modern feminism.)⁸⁰

Yet in "What a Waste", the persona cannot separate her 'defining role' of consumer, enough to adequately operate in the common workplace, that is, 'the sphere outside'. The relentless connection of consumerism with women's roles and women's successes is demonstrated by Gig Ryan as a hinderance. The gendering of the shopping mall space as one designed and used primarily by women, and the assumption that most consumers are women, emphasises a dichotomy. This dichotomy is harmful because of its propensity to subordinate one value below another.⁸¹

Gig Ryan collages words, replacing nouns for adjectives - "a smothering giftshop hand", an attitude that "trolleys out to me", and somebody's "eyes waiting like a receipt to be paid attention." These are valid challenges to two languages, that of the consumer as well as written or spoken language. Her placing of words together is playful and exploratory. But there is also a serious connection made between the production of meaning and the lack of conscious control over word and object associations.

Although the symbolic dimension of language ...works to repress the semiotic, the maternal nonetheless persists in the oral and instinctual aspects of language which

punctuate, evade, or disrupt the symbolic order - in prosody, intonation, puns, verbal slips, even silences: a site of meaning counter to, though inscribed within, the symbolic.⁸²

Interestingly enough, subconscious associations of object and word are deliberately aimed at in standard advertising practice. As Kevin Blackburn has discovered, a 1956 copy of *Australasian Grocer* tells us "...most advertising tends to work on a subconscious plane. It is necessary therefore to be...sensational...An emotional impact carries tremendous weight."⁸³ If we consider the romanticisation given consumer goods in advertising, it is hardly surprising to find objects as adjectives in contemporary fiction. As far back as 1911, Walter Dill Scott was prophesising that

The man with the proper imagination is able to conceive of any commodity in such a way that it becomes an object of emotion to him and to those whom he imparts his picture, and hence creates desire rather than a mere feeling of ought.⁸⁴

After the world wars, the perceived target audience for the patronage of shopping facilities and consumerism changed from masculine to feminine. As the decades progressed, the focus on women as the primary consumers became so intense that phrases amongst advertising executives in *Australasian Grocer* went more along the lines of "Mrs Average Housewife leads a lonely, insular daytime existence, that's why she responds to brightness, cheerfulness and companionship of her fellows in the store", and "women in all civilised societies can be influenced by the same 'selling technique'".⁸⁵ In more recent years, Terry Eagleton uses less gender specific language, but the level of romanticisation about consumption remains the same:

The commodity disports itself with all comers without its halo slipping, promises permanent possession to everyone in the market without abandoning its secretive

isolation. Serialising its consumers, it nevertheless makes intimate *ad hominem* address to each.⁸⁶

Considering the fetishisation of the object impressed upon the psyche by advertising and display, it is hardly surprising that the female office workers in "What a Waste" occupy a kind of never-never land. One worker is described thus:

She directs the two 30-yr-old clerks to file away her letters, husbands, facepacks, the articles on assertiveness training for women that she henges around, solidifying with the other women, me for instance, only for a tableau to be looked at, a wall to be pillaged (50)

The complexity of the preoccupation with image and object impressed upon women, is propelled by the way in which consumerism is able to operate from a multiplicity of points. As a discursive apparatus for women, consumerism wavers between offering an avenue for resistance and a path to subjugation. Drawing on Foucault's model of sexuality,⁸⁷ Mica Nava agrees that consumerism can exercise control "through the incitement and proliferation of increasingly detailed and comprehensive discourses". Yet, Nava concedes that because of the diffuse nature of this control, because it is not unitary, it is also vulnerable. If this is the case, then the preoccupation with imagery and with buying things can be understood not only as part of this new technology of power, but as both a form of subjection to it and a form of resistance.⁸⁸ For the female office worker who hides her facepacks yet henges around her articles on assertiveness training for women, only to use against other women in the office, resistance and subjection seem to cancel one another out. Ultimately, in Gig Ryan's treatment, this woman's discourse comes across as even less than 'a violence that we do to things'.⁸⁹ It is a discourse that has turned in on itself, and is therefore powerless.

It is interesting that the architecture of the office in "What a Waste" exists in a similarly ambiguous space as the fetishised commodity, in the minds of the workers. The building is alive with discontent; "hopes muggy like the airconditioning." (47) The problems and aspirations of each worker become walls themselves: "guided gently to your personal jail for the rest of the afternoon at the staring clock and her terrified plastic tense coldness." (49)

Wittgenstein has said that language can be seen as an ancient city.⁹⁰ Perhaps here in "What a Waste", the melding of the architectural setting with the emotional may have some relevance to recent theoretical discussions on the public versus the personal and the politics of urban planning. Judy Wajcam suggests that

While non-residential architecture has gone through massive transformations in style, building materials and construction technology, the preference for Georgian and Victorian domestic architecture remains (reflecting)...an attachment to traditional values and a desire that the home should be a haven, resembling the workplace as little as possible.⁹¹

"What a Waste", launches the domestic realm directly into the non-residential. The actual instance of the collision of these two worlds is a subject not adequately dealt with in theories of urban planning. Judy Wajcam's work, for example, moves on to concentrate on the way in which architecture and urban planning have orchestrated a separation of public and private, paid and home employment, production and consumption, production and reproduction, women and men.⁹² She does concede that people do not actually live according to these dichotomies, but suggests that the widespread belief in them by decision makers does influence women's lives. In her discussion of the shopping mall, Meaghan Morris emphasises what she calls the 'humanist' distinction between the 'user's meanings' (the personal) and the 'designers' meanings' (the professional), only to suggest that a feminist study of

shopping and shopping centres ought to occupy this user/designer, memory/aesthetics gap.⁹³

Sue Rowley enters a much more progressive argument by urging that the private/personal dichotomy be made dysfunctional, and that continued use of the dichotomy to shape critical discourse ultimately works to reinstate it as a central interpretative device.

'public/private dichotomy' refers to an *ideology* which not only describes a perception of the natural order, but also prescribes patterns of social organisation. This is not so much a unified, consistent, single ideology as a complex and negotiated identification of femininity with domesticity...⁹⁴

Rowley works to reveal the 'private' or the 'not-public' as that which has been deliberately 'disqualified', historically, from public knowledge and communication. Relegations to the 'private' realm have been derived from the sense of the private as bound up with *particular* interests, interests that are the constructs of bourgeois individualism. Furthermore, she exposes 'not-public' as a bourgeois construct in itself, revealing that the domestic experience of the impoverished and the vulnerable has rarely been safe from public and state surveillance and intervention.⁹⁵

These concepts can force us to look at the writing of particular theorists on the public spaces of consumerism with new interest. John Fiske's use of the private/public dichotomy to study the mall as a 'women's domain', goes to the extent of summarising the "value structure" of "a society that addresses women as consumers and men as producers". The masculine, he outlines for us, is historically constructed as being about the public, work, earning, production, empowerment and freedom. Directly opposing this, the feminine is about the private, leisure, spending, consumption, disempowerment and slavery. Fiske's illustration of these dichotomies

goes as far as drawing the two in separate and distinct columns down the printed page.⁹⁶

At the same time, Fiske speaks of the desire to investigate the practice of "making do". He praises a general academic shift away from 'structures' to 'practices', "away from the grand narrative, toward the particular".⁹⁷ His argument - that the domestic is the space historically occupied by women and that the domestic *is* the particular - opposes domestic experience as containing the 'universality' that is so easily applied to the 'grand narrative' of public space. By moving away from one pole of the dichotomy toward the other, Fiske seems only to reinstate the oppositional relationship, and ultimately therefore, reinstate the address of consumerism toward a specific gender. This is demonstrated in his investigation into 'newness', as an interest that is central to the economic and ideological interests of capitalism. Here, he proposes that Western societies see time as linear, forward moving and inevitably productive of change and that it is the mature, white middle class male who is most likely to have the sort of job that is characterised as producing such change.

For women, on the other hand, who are more likely to have the non-progressive, non-achieving job of wife -mother or... more routine, repetitive jobs, it may be that participation in fashion is their prime, if not there only means of participating in the ideology of progress.⁹⁸

By dichotomising, Fiske has set up a vicious circle that is already labelling motherhood as non achieving, and the participation in fashion as an easily attainable and appropriate opposite to this. For women writers of fiction, speaking of consumerism rarely excludes some demonstration of the desire to collapse such boundaries. Any such given and discrete categories are inevitably questioned. "What a Waste" works to directly collapse the exclusivity consumer language. Consumerism as language is exposed as the incomplete, unsubstantiated discourse that it is.

Perhaps the ability for consumerism to 'manufacture invisibility' is best demonstrated unconsciously by Fiske himself, in the opening of this chapter. To suggest that the window shopper, immediately gendered by Fiske as female, is able to exert as much social control from looking, as she is from speaking, is to enshrine woman as object. Fiske suggests that by controlling her 'look', that is, how the female consumer looks to others and therefore how they look upon her, the female window shopper constructs meaning and therefore language. But such a language is immediately subordinating. It is hardly surprising that with this kind of sexual objectification against her, Gig Ryan's persona needs to walk around and around the structures in place. She is questioning and contemplative. Her position is definable neither through fetish nor narcissism.

This *particular* experience of the persona in "What a Waste" does not oppose any 'grand' public narrative, but is bundled up *within* the 'grand' and the collective. The two are part of one inseparable experience and therefore form an appropriate language, sewn together by Gig Ryan from the traditionally mutually exclusive 'languages'. This weaving means that the images, objects and spaces of consumerism, architecture and office work in "What a Waste" are investigated for ambiguities. Representation is demonstrated to be not a container of immutable truths, but a multiplicity of relations that position subjects in an accordingly complex pattern of personal, interpersonal and communal discourses.⁹⁹ Accordingly, phrases splinter beside one another and meaning runs between each phrase as well as independantly within any phrase. This fragmentation plays a part in Gig Ryan's quest for meaning. If fragmentation fosters social complexity here, it is because not only are those social complexities already in place, but they require discussion.

To conclude, it is reasonable to reject the notion of consumerism as behaving as a kind of language, and one whose primary 'users' and/or 'audience' is women.

Consumerism is not necessarily able to behave as an empowering language for women and can work, along with the engendering of shopping places as women's domains, to limit women's experience and discourse. What becomes obvious from Gig Ryan's writing is a struggle with consumerism as language, particularly as it is handed out through advertising and display. Commodities are not goods through which to adequately think and speak. Gig Ryan's use of fragmentation to reject definitive language boundaries opens up possibilities for discourses that might otherwise remain unspoken. The implications of such fragmentation for the contemporary character and the representation of the self within consumerism are accordingly complex, and will form part of the body of debate in the next chapter.

⁶⁴ Fiske (1989), p. 34.

⁶⁵ *Second Degree Tampering: writing by women*, Sybilla Feminist Press: Melbourne, 1992. All further references are to this edition and page references will be given in parentheses in the text.

⁶⁶ Chaney (1990), p. 52.

⁶⁷ Sofia (1992), p. 133.

⁶⁸ Morris (1988), p. 204.

⁶⁹ Fiske (1989), p. 25-6. Fiske's use of the language of violence punctuates his writing on power relations throughout the chapter. His is very much a piece regarding the economic and political power battles contained within the shopping mall. Unfortunately this phallogentric use of language seems to undermine his (well intentioned) discussion of gender.

⁷⁰ Fiske (1989), p. 29.

⁷¹ M. Douglas and B. Isherwood (1978), *The World of Goods: Toward an Anthropology of Consumption*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 57 & p. 59.

⁷² Williamson (1986), p. 230.

⁷³ Fiske (1989), p. 36.

⁷⁴ David Harvey (1989), *The Condition of Postmodernity*, London: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Ferrier (1987), p. 1.

⁷⁶ Francis Jaffer (n.d.), "Procedures for Having Lunch", unpublished manuscript, as cited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1986), "For The Etruscans", *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. London: Virago.

⁷⁷ Sean Cubbitt (1991), *Timeshift on Video Culture*, Routledge: London & New York, p. 29.

⁷⁸ Morris (1988), p. 194.

⁷⁹ Williamson (1986), p. 226.

⁸⁰ Mica Nava (1987), "Consumerism and its Contradictions", *Cultural Studies*, 1(2): 208.

⁸¹ For a more detailed discussion of the dichotomy and its ability to subordinate, see Sue Rowley (1993) "Going Public: Getting Personal", *Dissonance Anthology*. Ed. Catriona Moore, Allen & Unwin: Sydney, 1993 (in press). See also various discussions in Raman Selden (1989).

⁸² Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman*, p. 148

⁸³ "When a Woman Shops", *Australasian Grocer*, October 1956, p. 79. As cited by Kevin Blackburn (1992) "'The Consumers Ethic' of Australian Advertising Agencies 1950-1965", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 32: March 1992: p. 71

⁸⁴ Walter Dill Scott, *Influencing Men in Business*, New York: The Ronald Press Co., enlarged edition, 1928, p. 131.

85 "Why Do People Buy", *Australasian Grocer*, April 1959, p. 111. and Professor Robert Dubelle as quoted in "When Milady Goes Shopping", *Australasian Grocer*, July 1956, p. 133. Both of these are as cited by Blackburn (1992), p. 70.

86 Terry Eagleton (1981), *Walter Benjamin, or Toward a Revolutionary Criticism*, London, p. 27.

87 Michel Foucault (1979), *The History of Sexuality*, vol 1., London: Allen Lane.

88 Nava (1987), p. 21-2.

89 Raman Selden refers to Foucault's idea that discourses are produced within a real world of power and struggle; that power is gained through discourse and that discourse is therefore a 'violence that we do to things.' "Postructuralist Theories", *A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, (2nd ed.) Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p. 102.

90 Wittgenstein, as cited by Ihab Hassan (1972), "Cities of Mind, Urban Words", *Literature and the Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature* eds. Michael C Jaye & Anne Chalmers Watts, Rutgers U. P., New Jersey., p. 93.

91 Wajcam (1991), p. 118.

92 Wajcam (1991), p. 110.

93 Morris (1988), p. 206.

94 Sue Rowley (1993), "Going Public: Getting Personal", *Dissonance Anthology*. Ed Catriona Moore. Sydney: Allen & Unwin (in press).

95 Rowley (1993).

96 Fiske (1989), p. 22.

97 Fiske (1989), p. 32.

98 Fiske (1989), p. 40.

99 Rowley (1993) coins the phrase 'complex pattern of personal, interpersonal and communal', which I think is not only a clever juxtaposition of these labels, but a usage which does well to approach the problem of the aforementioned boundaries with available words.

Chapter Four

Structure, Fictional Character and the Self:

Red Roses for Me?



...in the postmodern condition it is hyperlooking for a shopper who is, in the end, only looking for his or her virtual self..the voyeuristic form of the hyperlook, the look which fantasises, appropriates, and discards, and all this at a second glance.

Kroker, Kroker & Cooke 100

They say that stars give you something to dream about, but there is a difference between dreaming and fascination by images. They are a system of luxury prefabrication, brilliant synthesis of stereotypes of life and love. *They embody one single passion, the passion for images, and the immanence of desire in the image...*Fetishes, fetish objects, that have nothing to do with the world of imagination and everything to do with *the material fiction of the image.* (His italics)

Jean Baudrillard 101

This chapter is concerned with the self as consumer and the representation of the consumer self as fiction. The discussion will concentrate on the most recent work by Ania Walwicz, *Red Roses*, and look at Walwicz's representation of the self in terms of the kind of 'looking' encouraged by consumer capitalism.¹⁰² How much does consumerism encourage the ideology of individualism, and how much of the seduction of advertising succeeds because of an individual's quest for knowledge? Fragmentation seems to be a given when we look at representing the contemporary self. But it is a contradictory state, both celebratory and lonely.

The above passage from Kroker, Kroker and Cooke asserts that 'hyperlooking' is a predominating characteristic of the contemporary shopper. The proposal is that we are able to fantasise, appropriate and discard all in a glance, and furthermore, that what we are fantasising over, is our own image. Kroker et al go on to speak of shopping as "the pleasure of the gaze as it plays fictionally with the possibility of possession."¹⁰³ Objects are considered merely because of the identities we associate them with. Subsequently a whole series of possible identities are constantly in the process of being appropriated and discarded.

This preoccupation with one's own identity, and with its possibilities, is encouraged on every level by consumer capitalism. David Harvey tells us of image consultants who warn that "people make up their minds about you in around one tenth of a second these days".¹⁰⁴ Such an assumption presupposes not just that the visual image is the most important aspect of a 'self', but also that we are stereotyped by a constant flow onlookers continually, from day to day. If we do not look 'appropriate', we might remain forever anonymous, never becoming a part of the *imagined* community. The existence of an accepting and familiar local community is not considered viable. It is this same set of circumstances or beliefs which promotes the sale and success of the imitation car phone:

A California firm manufactures imitation car telephones, indistinguishable from the real ones, and they sell like hotcakes to a populace desperate to acquire such a symbol of importance.¹⁰⁵

This is the fictioning continuum, materialised. Baudrillard's own use of the term 'material fiction of the image' is in reference to people themselves, that is, to the proliferation of 'stars'. Baudrillard describes the famous as having entered a system of 'luxury prefabrication' that reforms the dragging nature of everyday existence into a dazzling fiction. The motivation for structure, character and setting in this fiction

revolves around the passion for images. According to Baudrillard, 'material fiction' has nothing to do with imagination, but all to do with a superficial fascination with images on the part of the viewer. Indeed, the institutionalisation of the fictioning continuum has meant that we are often unable to tell the difference between this well organised fascination and our own imagination. For with a fiction comes plot and with a plot comes a 'small world' in which we are easily able to immerse ourselves.¹⁰⁶ The materiality of fiction in consumer capitalism means that to a certain extent, we can physically enter into the fantastic.

The fetishisation of the object through advertising and display, such as is the case with the artificial car phone, encourages an emotional and dreamlike desire for the material. This is so to such an extent that Kroker, Kroker and Cook ask us

Is it that the self now is a virtual object to such a degree of intensity and accumulation that the fascination of the shopping mall is in the way of a homecoming to a self which has been lost, but now happily rediscovered? The postmodern self as one more object in the simulacra of objects.¹⁰⁷

Kroker, Kroker and Cooke tend to affirm notions as the 'virtual' self to such a degree that questioning is generally uncalled for. Certainly here, their questioning of the notion of homecoming to a virtual self is steeped in rhetoric. I am conscious, in my own writing, that affirmation of the conditions consumer capitalism places on notions of self might be read as a celebration of such conditions. On the contrary, mine is an investigation, and not a signal of political support for consumer capitalism. Nevertheless, on the subject of the self and the ideology of individualism, I do not intend to suggest that all the fragmentation, simulation, and fictionality which the self encompasses within consumerism is inherently negative.

Similarly, the fragmented self in Ania Walwicz's *Red Roses*, does not ultimately benefit nor suffer under the conditions which the fictioning continuum places upon her. The fragmentation of the persona through a multiplicity of the voice, forms an exploratory discourse. There is both escapism and confrontation. There is on one hand no autonomous individual, and on the other hand a desire for a sense of the individual, constantly eluded. The stars of which Baudrillard has spoken, infiltrate the persona's voice, actions, whereabouts and aspirations.

oh help me charlie chaplin comes out in my feet most of all she said i'm sorry didn't
write to you because of distress dis tress tess she was theresa your mother was a saint
from breslau tess d'urbervilles and thérèse raquin she was miss julie who is mother i am
the daughter of hedda gabler (34)

The book concentrates on searching for the persona's lost mother. Her mother becomes everything, everyone. The mother is therefore the absent and the all pervasive, simultaneously. The mother, just as Kroker, Kroker and Cooke have suggested of the contemporary shopper, is a 'virtual self'. Ania, the persona, in her search for the lost mother, is no different. She saunters off into fiction after fiction, returning to the now only to disappear again. We follow her conversations with Donald Duck, her immersion in Nazi Germany, endless film and novel romances, advertisements, Hollywood gossip, all of which rarely last for more than a page or two of the actual novel. Ania interrupts these metafictional wanderings occasionally to speak of her self in the present text:

the self merges with other objects a polymorphous work all statements are performative
then the writing an end in itself or is it a way of getting over her over me the king is
very sad in my fairytale the magician travels just to get me out an act of magic the
magician but a real one for does this i am producing a language this is structure and a

discourse lebenswelt of a love what is the intention of the author then i am trying to solve a riddle or unwind a thread (119/20)

The self is therefore keen to be a kind of 'virtual' self, to be completed by other stories and fictions as well as its own. But in *Red Roses*, the absence of the mother and the persona's desire to find her plays a large part. In some ways, therefore, the *desire* to be an autonomous individual and to find a single answer is responsible for the endless fragmentation and the infiltration of countless other fictional individuals into the initial self.

Baudrillard professes that there is no self-contained individual, there are only ways of using social systems, particularly those of language, goods and kinship, to relate people differently to the social order and thereby create the 'sense' of the individual.¹⁰⁸ Fiske also makes a valid contribution to this subject when he illustrates the relationship between the ideology of individualism and that of consumer choice:

On the economic level such glittering excess provides a daily demonstration that the capitalist system works, and on the ideological level that individualism can flourish within it. A wide consumer choice is not an economic requirement, but a requirement of the ideology of individualism.¹⁰⁹

It is interesting that the persona in *Red Roses* is inseparable from the author. She is Ania, and the book becomes part of a meta-fictional autobiography. Certainly bits and this journey be true, but what is and is not fiction becomes irrelevant. Everything revolves around what Ania wants, what she desires. Foremost, this is her lost mother, but simultaneously it is a menagerie of consumer roleplays:

i want to be away in the house of in johnston's warehouse the bridal house of glory a storehouse of materials i'll make a soft dress for a donkey i'll make a cheese macaroni

i'll embroider a doily i have five hundred dollars to spend at the windsor tonight but
how can i go...(101)

successful introduction arranged for those seeking happy marriages charmingly natural
portraits of yourself and your children taken in your own house or garden learn flower
arranging submarine swimming caps protects your hair and ears...(200)

a young woman's ideal clothes gaberdine pants for evenings in wool the stockists bas et
collant yves st laurent the silk story sweater tights parfum chanel...the flattery of
elegant satin scrolls dressing for a way of life streamlines legs an antelope my favourite
place is paris...(78)

The search is constructed through this plethora of self referential fetish objects taken straight from the shops, aisleways, advertisements and popular fictions of consumer capitalism. Ania can easily cite Paris, for example, as her favourite place, though the chances are that she has travelled there only through the languages of advertising and display and never physically. Similarly, she is caught up in the romance and spectacle of bridal wear and can, in pretending to be preparing for the wedding, live the 'star' quality of the occasion over and over a hundredfold.

It is certainly the ideology of individualism enshrined by consumerism that is personified by Ania in *Red Roses*. And this is an ideology fraught with contradictions. The elusive complexity of individualism might be well demonstrated if we look to the way it is incorporated into the architecture of the shopping mall. Most malls this author has visited demonstrate individualism as being directly related to wealth structure. The supermarkets and cheaper department stores, which in Sydney we could cite as Franklins, Coles and KMart, as well as shops such as newsagents, make no attempt to stress the individuality or originality of their goods. Fiske has called these kind of shops "democratic" shops.¹¹⁰ Their items are frequently mass

produced and are displayed as so. The importance of individual differences increase as we ascend the escalators, lifts and stairways to the higher echelons of consumerism. On the top floor of many an arcade, the exclusive nature of goods and services is paramount. Uniqueness and originality, the backbones of the quest for individuality, form the basis of advertising and display. What *Red Roses* demonstrates very succinctly, is that the ideology of individualism through fame, drama and fashion directs intimate marketing strategies toward the consumer. The fictioning continuum works paradoxically to both fragment or multiply the self, whilst installing the desire for a unique individuality.

The contradictory nature of this construction of imaginary lives within our own is related to an earlier discussion in this thesis. As Davis has noted regarding notions of neighbourhood in the suburban mall, "the key to profits seemed to be in the exotic and bizarre rather than the local and familiar."¹¹ Our construction of self through consumerism can be similarly based on the foreign as the fantasised over. In such a state of self, it is easy to do as Ania does, to traipse off into a terminal, invented adventure, and yet to also be totally aware of the 'inventedness' of this state. Towards the end of the book, still having come no closer to finding her elusive mother figure, Ania concedes:

the images don't have her all of her they don't have her anymore they are becoming independent of her they are becoming their own away from her they are becoming their own this is not me or just mine i am looking...i was just looking for hours i was looking then i was inventing stories from pictures she is coming back now and then but not all the time... (184)

This practice of inventing stories from pictures is precisely what advertising designers hope for us to do. It is of course, very much to do with the 'material fiction of the image'. It is because of our own immersion in this type of fiction that Sydney's

Channel Ten Eyewitness News might have coined the advertising slogan: "Everything that happens, everyday, affects YOU. Be the first to know." Of course the majority of news items have very little immediate and actual effect on most regular viewers. But each viewer's fictional involvement is affected. Another slogan we might look to is one quoted by Mark Titmarsh in a catalogue titled *Metaphysical T.V.* "We no longer have roots," he says, "we have aerials." The contemporary self depends upon an "imagined community" and the invention of stories from advertised pictures, as Ania does, to create a self-referential construct of everyday life. In this way, consumer desire might be very caught up with self knowledge.

Zoe Sofia compares Eve's biting of the apple in Eden to 'research'. In that moment, she proposes, to know was to consume and to consume was to know.¹¹² Relating this to contemporary consumer capitalism and the regular mall user, Sofia elaborates:

In these postmodern times we might find a middle class suburban Eve tastefully dressed, sampling the fruits of multi-national capitalism...at Garden City Buragoon, doing a little shopping.¹¹³

Sofia thus proposes that acts of consumption are still tied up with the acquisition of knowledge. This is so not just on the level of the individual shopper, but also on the level of what Sofia calls "the global enterprise of corporate capitalism/cannibalism", as multinational companies themselves consume the earth's resources in return for knowledge, and knowledge is the key to profit. The seeking out of consumables and the discovery of knowledge are intimately bound together in *Red Roses*. Ania searches to know the absent mother by consuming story, picture, object, text, frame:

everything is becoming my mother everyone is becoming my mother all texts speak about her she is in them she is talking to me through them and this she is talking...(21)

We could say that every consumer sees in the contemporary array of images, the opportunity to obtain some kind of knowledge, the answer to some desire or the opportunity for self fulfilment. And yet this desire remains eternally unfulfilled. In a sense then, the contemporary self is forever incomplete.

Red Roses shows a clear awareness of the way in which Walwicz's reader might equate knowledge with the consumption of the text. At times as a reader we are frustrated by the not-knowing. Walwicz teases us:

you never reveal her completely or yourself why do should i you have to make her up
i'm just giving suggestions i don't want to say completely and fully i'm just hinting at
a story then you just read me carefully the reader participates the reader reads the reader
makes me i'm going to england i'm in a plane taking off there's nothing you can do
(116)

The conclusion to *Red Roses* similarly avoids the conferral of knowledge in any final or definitive manner. The persona's mother is not found, the persona is not satisfied, nor is the reader satisfied with any piece of 'believable' information or tell tale clue as to who, what, where or why the persona's mother might have been. And yet, we are given a conclusion of sorts. On the final page, the mother is the eiffel tower in the form of a keyring, a book, a picture - the ultimate, famous 'consumable' entity. Ania visits as a tourist. The final line reads: "i am walking away now i see her from a train she gets smaller and smaller and smaller she is gone".

In one sense this ending may suggest that the quest for the mother's identity, and therefore Ania's, is over. Ania might have given up. But in another sense it means that the search continues indefinitely. There is too much blank space that follows this break in the middle of a line. There is no full stop.

Walwicz's writing has always been intimately bound up with establishing some identity. But it is never the search for a definitive and singular identity. Sue Gillett has said of the conclusion of a piece of Walwicz's earlier work:

Walwicz's collection of writing differs in important ways from the typically humanist process of establishing identity. The final voice has not found and retrieved its origin in and from the roots of childhood, but rather obtains its strength from the facts of change and escape.¹¹⁴

Just as with Gig Ryan's use of language in "What a Waste," Ania Walwicz's writing is about changing language and escaping from dominant discourses to find new methods of speaking. Walwicz's running together of the production of meaning and a lack of conscious control forms connections which might be denied, if the dominant representational modes of speaking and writing were employed. Her rambling and pluralistic search for a singular identity works to deliberately undermine its own intention. The self both desires a central *being as presence*, a singular 'I', a singular origin, and yet finds such a notion oppressive, even false. Walwicz's use of famous personalities therefore goes beyond Baudrillard's assertion that the stars may "embody one single passion only: the passion for images." Walwicz demonstrates that the pleasure of the gaze, as it plays fictionally with the identities produced by consumerism, can form a discourse in itself.

Meaghan Morris insists that a feminist analysis of consumerism, particularly of shopping centres, ought to embody an ambivalence about its objects rather than a similarity 'before' them. She posits that such ambivalence allows a contemplation of contradictory states and does not eliminate the moment of everyday discontent: anger, frustration, sorrow, irritation, hatred, boredom, fatigue. If feminism embodies a movement of discontent with the everyday as 'the way things are', an unchangeable

state, then ambivalence provides a position for speaking about this.¹¹⁵ Ania, in *Red Roses*, takes such a position. She is simultaneously in childhood, in adulthood, in the viewer's chair, in the screen romance, with the lost mother and away from her. This epitomises Morris's notion of the lived ambiguity, a notion which she sees most perceptively drawn in the structure of the contemporary mall:

As the sociologist John Carroll reports with a cheerfulness of the true conservative, "The promotions Manager of one of the Shopping World chains in Australia has speculated that these centres may replace the need for valium." Carroll doesn't add anything about their role in creating needs for valium, or in selling it, but only if you combine all three functions do you get a sense, I think, of the shopping world's lived ambiguity.¹¹⁶

It is this same lived ambiguity through which Ania's self is striving to speak and to know. It is for the same ambivalent reasons that she is at once impersonator and the 'true' persona. Her mother also exists in this state: "this is where she hasn't been and she is "(124). The self rejects nothing and, through this fragmented and ambiguous state, inquires austere into the social constructedness of selves. Ania's self is thereby able to deny the particular construction which it has been modelled into and demonstrate a desire for greater freedom - the freedom to create a more suitable and malleable network of the self. This position enables not only pleasure, play, and a place for the fictional in the everyday, but allows for the discontents, the expenditure, the exhaustion: "words are stumbling me but i'm not strict i need a new wardrobe"(145).

¹⁰⁰ Kroker, Kroker and Cooke (1989), p. 209.

¹⁰¹ Baudrillard (1986), p. 57.

¹⁰² Ania Walwicz (1992), *Red Roses*, University of Queensland Press: St Lucia QLD. All references are to this edition and page numbers will be given within parentheses in the text.

¹⁰³ Kroker, Kroker and Cooke (1989), p. 209.

¹⁰⁴ David Harvey (1989), *The Condition of Postmodernity*, London: Basil Blackwell Ltd, p. 288-9

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- 105 Harvey (1989), p. 288.
- 106 For a more detailed discussion of what is meant here by the term 'small worlds', please refer back to Chapter One and the section on Dolozel and Eco.
- 107 Kroker, Kroker and Cooke (1989), p. 208.
- 108 Jean Baudrillard (1981), *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign.*, St Louis: Telos.
- 109 Fiske (1989), p. 35.
- 110 Fiske, (1989), p. 38.
- 111 Davis (1991), p. 5.
- 112 Sofia, (1992), p. 133.
- 113 Sofia (1992), p. 133.
- 114 Sue Gillett (1990) "Contemporary Departures from Realism: Placing Australia", PhD Dissertation, La Trobe University, Melbourne, p. 197.
- 115 Morris (1988), p. 197
- 116 Morris (1988), p. 207, quoting from John Carroll "Shopping World: An Afternoon in the Palace of Modern Consumption", *Quadrant*, August 1979, p. 15.

Chapter Five

Constructing the Consumer Body - Recent Work by Joanne Burns



in the dark jasmine air of the Fantasmart she waited. there were two customers ahead of her. she wanted to sample the multiorgasm disc in the privacy of a booth....maybe trolley sex would be fun to try, especially with a third player pushing the trolley up and down the aisle while you were...erosgeneering. the 'f' word was discouraged. too inflammatory.

Joanne Burns "original sin" 117

Our insertion as individual subjects into the shopping mall environment is a physical set of circumstances as much as it is psychological or political event. Because of consumerism's emphasis on image, the body and our own relations to our bodies are also subject to certain manipulation by the fantasy of advertising. Drawing on the previous chapter's discussion of the self in relation to the material fiction of the image, this chapter looks particularly at the physical body in relation to consumerism. Consumer products are swallowed, implanted and taken in by the body. The shopping mall, meanwhile, sets itself up as a plethora of bodily metaphors. Such circumstance has provided much of the impetus for contemporary fiction writers to reinvent the body in fiction. The new physical body has become something which is inextricable from the consumer basis of contemporary living. There are no boundaries. The result is a substitutable, even artificial body. This has resounding effects on the representation of the contemporary character, who in Joanne Burns' fiction, exists in a state of limbo somewhere between parody and a spirited poetic.

Zoe Sofia took a group of university undergraduates to her local mall in Perth to look at what Sofia calls "The Science-fictionalisation of the Real", particularly in relation to the body. It was concluded that the mall can be seen as a miraculously self replenishing provider, a sort of a mother body.

While the designers and ultimate profit makers of Garden City were (presumably) predominantly men, the..(physical)...space itself was gendered feminine, and two students considered the whole centre as a metaphor of female reproductive organs, with the roads leading like cars up to it like sperm to the ovum...breast like lighting features..etc.¹¹⁸

This architectural structure works to place the spectator, particularly the female one, in a particular kind of voyeuristic position that is both outside and within the body of consumption. Sofia posits the female viewer as an active spectator:

...the environment made appeals to all senses, but gave particular emphasis to vision - and we noted that foods of all kinds were displayed - often photographically - for ocular rather than oral consumption. Meditating on the circular perfection of a mandala of chops, sausages, bacon, steak, we understood how hard the centre worked to seduce the woman shopper, constructing her as a Ms Pac Man: the vaginal cannibaleye.¹¹⁹

She goes on to argue that the 'Sci Fi of the Real', (a label which is implicitly Sofia's equivalent of 'the fictioning continuum') has an unconscious appeal, that might be attributed to the way in which it articulates pre-Oedipal fantasies - bisexual, cannibalistic, excremental and epistimophilic. She reasons that these fantasies are common to the ideological belief in the world as infinite resource and the subsequent eternal suburban quest for commodities.

While gender specifics brings with it its own dangers, Sofia places an interesting significance on the architectural design of the mall in her quest for meaning regarding the body of and in consumerism. This is particularly so when we consider earlier discussions in this thesis regarding architecture as structure. Architecture, as with fiction, not only has a deliberate structure, but is able to behave as structure, in the organisational sense. This concept of shopping spaces epitomising the 'body of Big

Mother', considers such space as forming or coming from one transnational capitalism. Another kind of body itself, Sofia labels the all pervasive transnational capitalism an "extra terrestrial".

At the same time, Baudrillard speaks of the 'internal refraction' of contemporary public architecture, which he sees as stemming from a predominant usage of glass and reflection. The mall around which my studies have centred, Miranda Fair, certainly subscribes to this design, both inside and out. Baudrillard posits that such usage blurs exterior and interior:

No interior/exterior interface. The glass facades merely reflect the environment, sending back its own image. This makes them much more formidable than any wall of stone. It's just like people who wear dark glasses. Their eyes hidden and others see only their own reflection. Everywhere the pretentiously termed "communication" and "interaction" - walkman, dark glasses, automatic household appliances, hi-tech cars, even the perpetual dialogue with computer - ends up with each monad retreating into the shadow of its own formula, into its self-regulating little corner and its artificial immunity.¹²⁰

Baudrillard's reading of the individual's physical experience within contemporary architecture is therefore quite different to Sofia's. And yet, in a sense, both are coming from the same kinds of considerations. Both take into account the contrived, even artificial, nature of contemporary time and space.

David Harvey has looked into the relationship between contemporary time and space in some detail. He sees the contemporary individual as experiencing a rush of images from different spaces almost simultaneously, thus collapsing the world's spaces into a series of images.¹²¹ But David Chaney delivers one of the most concrete and straightforward explanations of the way in which our experience of time and space has been altered. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Chaney has given the example of

the wide scale development of the commuter train system last century, and the effect of this comparatively new physical experience on the traveller looking out from the train: "The landscape was not merely made more uniform but the intimate interdependence of space and time in pre-industrial experience was ruptured. Space literally shrank, while time expanded."¹²² This distortion of time and space has a direct influence on the way we see and or experience our own physicality. For the body cannot exist outside of or independently of time and space. In the shopping environment, as we have seen, the experience of the self as pluralistic, and indeed even 'virtual', complicates this matter further.

Vito Acconci debates the possibility of freedom for the contemporary body. He sees fragmentation as behaving metaphorically. Therefore:

The body blown into bits is the body freed into bits, but the technology of explosion is not free, and resides in the hands of a political power...the body inhabits architecture, sees movies, hears music...The danger of architecture is that the built environment, in order to be built, has been allowed to be built; the building institutionally allowed to exist, functions as a representation and confirmation and justification of that institution.¹²³

Joanne Burns' "palm trees" is a series of prose poems, or small stories, which are mostly about viewing the body from an alternative perspective. Burns asserts that the impetus for these works "came out of something I experienced from my psyche, rather than from theory."¹²⁴ She looks therefore, to non-Western ideas and experiences of the body such as yoga, meditation and the Hindu religion, where the boundaries between the physical and the ethereal are dissolved, positing the body as a form which need not be solid or contained. Here, you can see other things inside the body. For Burns, "the body becomes this whole little world which is a mirror of other things outside of it."¹²⁵

Despite this influence from Eastern mythology, Joanne Burns' characters are positioned firmly within the contemporary Western landscape. The existence of a flexible, playful body here - on buses, at kindergarten, in the supermarket - gives an element of surrealism. In the piece "public places", there exists a playful treatment of New Age body awareness, where the persona is so aware of her psychic state, she is unable to feel comfortable in the public arena:

that's why i decided to get a metal strip put at the base of my front door. then i wouldn't have to check that part of me had slipped through the space under the door. i have such plans dreams visions...¹²⁶

The character in question does seem overanxious, even paranoid. And yet, when she goes to the supermarket, there is the idea that you *do* leave imprints of yourself behind, and that her anxiety is somewhat justified:

there's so much of your personal history left on those jars, packets, tins. what science can extract from a fingerprint these days is nobody's business. it makes me feel uneasy.¹²⁷

It is interesting to consider this idea in light of Kroker, Kroker and Cooke, who propose that the point of sale, the act of buying, is an event which signifies the exteriorisation of self.¹²⁸ For the character in "public places", this exteriorisation, or the act of being vulnerable to it, is frightening. She imagines having her personal details electronically printed on her body in the form of a barcode, examining the idea that you can't control your own body and that the state might control it for you. Joanne Burns sets up a tension here, between the way in which a consumer reads knowledge via her senses, and the way in which the governing body of capitalism will read knowledge only through technological means: "you might be caught out by scanners anywhere, anytime."¹²⁹ Ironically the shopping place is marketed as a safe place for women to go alone.¹³⁰

Writing on fashion and the body, Patrizia Calefato endorses the argument of Vitto Acconci: "The body, embodied in the fashion scene is a substitute body, a body cut up into pieces."¹³¹ If the mall provides escape from everyday life while structuring how the body and mind are recharged, then the violence done to the body image in fashion and advertising may behave like a violence of rhetoric. By this I mean firstly that the language of advertising is a discourse based on power and is therefore, in the Foucauldian sense, 'a violence that we do to things'.¹³² But also, if the violence is in the language, before if not regardless of its concrete appearances in the world, then there is also a violence of rhetoric, or what Derrida has called "the violence of the letter"(in the case of advertising also the violence of the image).¹³³ Through a detailed analysis of these ideas on the violence of rhetoric, in *Technologies of Gender*, de Lauretis makes the valid point that such representation of violence is inseparable from the notion of gender, and that violence is indeed gendered in representation. ¹³⁴

Considering the body as some absolute (milk, blood, breasts, clitoris), therefore becomes a feminist concern.¹³⁵ Joanne Burns acknowledges that the representation of the body in the "palm trees" series, works to subvert the treatment of the body in fashion and advertising, to reject such "tight shapes and spaces that work against fluidity and change," as well as to refute "the hegemony of the Western body over other things."¹³⁶

Joanne Burns' published writing since *On a Clear Day* has developed a futurist slant. The body is still somewhat of a preoccupation, but now it moves playfully and with great irony, toward the political. "album" was first published in *Second Degree Tampering* and is essentially about the government controlling people through their own desire to look good, that is, their own narcissism. The subject has been prosecuted for protesting against government philosophy, and rather than be sent to a detention camp where "the continued assault of laughter attacking from invisible ducts

in quadraphonic sound made you shake and cry," the choice to pilot a new rehabilitation program is permitted.¹³⁷ Emphasis in the new program is on the construction of one's own image. The subject poses before a specially installed video camera at home, precisely every six hours. Thus the self portrait becomes a condition, not just a rule, but a state of being:

you'd been fascinated by your own image for a long time. even when you took your first steps at ten months it was toward a full length mirror. when your image appeared immediately on the screen below the lens, you were required to key in your report on any changes in facial expressions. any negativity, any hints of anti-social feelings were to be observed and commented on. this way it was felt that individuals could share, contribute to their own rehabilitation.¹³⁸

And so, "album" plays on the idea that we are obsessed by the way we look, and the fact that we are always wanting to look out best. The government rehabilitation program is an outstanding success. Because the participant wants to look good, he or she is unable to show any negativity, and is therefore totally manipulated. Joanne Burns cites "album" as

A joke on the obsession with camera, fashion and image, but it's a bit scary. There is a split between inner and outer - the brain and the skin. If you get angry it will show on your face.¹³⁹

This tension between the interior and the exterior is the same that exists for us as consumers in today's landscape of capitalism. We cannot relate our bodies truthfully to our experience of, or the expectations of advertising and display in the shopping mall. It is the same as Baudrillard's 'internal refraction', mentioned earlier in regard to architecture, where we are not permitted to be shown an interior/exterior interface. It is as if any exposure of the internal body or the uncontainable body is too threatening, as Calefato observes of the body in fashion:

A body without interiors, an automatic body. The automation as the 'evasion of the body', the fabrication of a perfect appearance, the smoothness of exterior forms: without interiors, without viscera, without the *horror* generated by the openings in the corporeal surface.¹⁴⁰

In "album", the horror of the unconfined, of anything below the surface, compounds as the rehabilitated victim is given the opportunity to promote and exemplify the benefits of the "album scheme", thus becoming not only the controlled, but the controlling body;

as a member of the narcissus team you would be able to give lectures on tv and tour both urban and rural precincts giving witness to your personal transformation. you would play a video documentary of your changed, more salubrious countenance. not just quick before and after images. something much more thorough. you would be allowed to edit the film, choose the best shots. you would even be allowed to draft your own script from your original reports.¹⁴¹

The subject then, is permitted to construct a fiction of his or her own, and this is part of the attraction. Of course, the feeling of control is deceptive. It is only part of the government's rehabilitation structure, part of the plan. This idea is strikingly similar to discussions on the power of the consumer within multi-national capitalism: "In a society predicated upon the marketing of images, images become a weapon of resistance."¹⁴² But as in "album" the consumer's use of a resistance precisely through the tools of consumption might also produce only a deceptive power. Zygmunt Bauman, in his article "Industrialism, Consumerism and Power" for example, has argued that the contemporary focus on the body in consumerism, represents a popular struggle for the reassertion of control:

Disciplinary power...was first and foremost about bodily control. It was the human body which for the first time in history was made, on such a massive scale, an object of drill and regimentation. Later consumerism was a product of failed resistance to such drill and regimentation. But what was negated could not but determine the substance and the form of its negation.¹⁴³

Consumerism as a weapon of resistance is therefore theorised by Bauman as, at most, a form of displaced resistance. But in Bauman's argument, the body is spoken of as a strict form. It is not a plastic, or malleable body, as we have experienced it in Joanne Burns' "palm trees" series. It is also interesting to consider Bauman's language of violence, where the engendered violence of rhetoric is only reinstated (the body as drilled and regimented).

Unlike Bauman's writing, Burns' emphasis on the perfectly contained surface of the body in "album" is a self-conscious one. The idea that intimate knowledge of one's own technological image produces a thorough level of self knowledge is steeped in irony. In the end, the persona's transformation, "to join the ranks of those who have already received lifelong exemption from the debt levy", promotes a subtextual absence, the absence of dissonance.¹⁴⁴ It is as if the subject's initial dissent stemmed directly from everything visceral and spiritual, everything uncontainable, and as long as the subject remains a participant in the "album scheme" this dissonance will not resurface. Although the "album scheme" belongs to a speculative future, it harbours a set of characteristics that differ very little from the treatment of the body image in the contemporary consumer landscape.

In a recent edition of *Hermes*, Joanne Burns published "original sin". Here is another futurist piece in which notions of the body takes precedence. "original sin" takes on sex in the post AIDS era, when people can no longer have real physical intercourse. The state has stepped in, not only to monitor fertility and foetus engineering in

specifically directed laboratories, but to encourage sex via virtual reality, outlawing physical contact. Unlike "album", this later piece takes the oppressive speculative circumstances in its stride, working against too much emphasis on the bleak political circumstances. As Joanne Burns says of the piece:

The real crime is that they can't 'fleshfuck', but I didn't want it to be that heavy, it's just as much fun to do what they're doing - for the reader - because it's something new. For the jaded and faded readers of erotica, it's perhaps a little bit different!¹⁴⁵

The dominant character in the piece, Pristina, organises a dinner party involving 'virtual' group sex. This is an exercise condoned by the state, and involves a fantastic set of practices. We follow Pristina to the Fantasmart where, as the excerpt from the piece shown in the opening to this chapter tells us, she surveys the shelves for an appropriate sexual fantasy disc. She chooses one titled "laying them in the aisles (shop till you drop)", foregrounding the fact that sex has become merely a device for capitalism:

she slipped the disc into the erospecs, pulled the specs over her face, strapped the play band just above her left knee, and ran through the scene. a gourmet supermarket, small with narrow intimate aisles. all desirable healthy looking shoppers. no underagers. she ran through the choice modes on the play band

attraction/arousal/approach/body contact

undress/caress/oral/anal/vag/clit/erect/pen

homo/lesbo/hetero/bi/couple/triple/quarto/group

and tried out a couple of them on 'laying in the aisles'. it looked just perfect for the evening she had in mind.¹⁴⁶

Thus the level of playfulness in Joanne Burns' writing veers us away from the seriousness of the issues in "original sin" and toward a level of cartoonism. The 'stimsuits', which the characters don for their 'technolusting' experience, border on the surreal. Here,

Contemporary fashion brings to fulfilment its function as the avatar of surrealism, in the sense of the surreal as an everyday presence, of everyday life as a 'fantastic *melange* of fiction and strange values.¹⁴⁷

In a sense this surrealism also corresponds to the "Sci Fi of the Real" where, as we saw earlier, the everyday experience of fiction in the shopping environment has an unconscious pre-oedipal appeal. Perhaps this unconscious appeal is related to the behaviour of the image as the container for a body unable to be contained. Towards the conclusion of "original sin", the discussion of erosgeneering amongst its participants becomes argumentative. One virtual sex partner complains of state control over the body, and desires release. But Pristina insists that the wide consumer choice available is empowering and enjoyable. Furthermore, she teases, "Don't you understand the beauty of being virtualised?"

This virtualisation of the sexual body, along with the employment of 'holo-lovers' - hologram partners to fiddle with on screens - is perhaps the ultimate in a substitutable consumer body. Perhaps this occurrence is not so far away as we expect. Heidegger uses the phenomena of contemporary fashion as an example of a similar kind of substitutability. For him, substitutability in fashion has become a form of being, since the garment no longer responds to what we could define as a practical function, responding instead to the specific character of being "the clothing of the moment...in expectation of the next."¹⁴⁸ Such an emphasis foregrounds the dilemma of the body in consumerism. But Heidegger's explanation does not take into account the fact that as consumers, we may enjoy this play. As with the conclusion to "original sin", where the 'ready' button on the stimsuits flashes in expectation of continued

consumer patronage, we, the users, can feel the weight of the political body pressing down upon us. Shopping is fun, and we are partial to it, but there is also an absence of the spiritual body, the natural body and our environment as an intricately balanced resource. These things are calling at the back of our minds. Considering these interests, the next and final chapter contemplates where it is that consumerism is taking us.

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- 117 *Hermes*, Sydney: University of Sydney Union, (1992), p. 62.
 118 Sofia (1990), p. 138.
 119 Sofia (1990), p. 138.
 120 Baudrillard (1986), p. 60.
 121 Harvey (1989), p. 293.
 122 Chaney (1990), p. 53.
 123 Vitto Acconci (1992), n.p.
 124 Personal Interview, September 1993, Sydney.
 125 Ibid.
 126 "public places" from *On a Clear Day*, University of Queensland Press, 1992, p. 20.
 127 "public places", p. 21.
 128 Kroker, Kroker, & Cooke (1989), p. 210.
 129 Joanne Burns, Personal Interview, September 1993, Sydney.
 130 "In the USA, walking is a threatening activity...so therefore the prevailing social conclusion: For a safe place to exercise, particularly for women, go to the mall", Kroker et al, 1989, p. 209. This idea has been well publicised in Australia also, with a series of articles on commercial television's nightly news, about the "Mall Walkers" in the United States; a nationwide organisation of elderly people who flock to the mega-malls, presumably simply to clock up a certain numbers of kilometres in 'safe' exercise. (Channels 7 and 10, Sydney, 1992)
 131 Patrizia Calefato (1989) "Fashion, The Passage, The Body", trans. Nelson Moe, *Cultural Studies*, 3: 3., n.p.
 132 Michel Foucault, as cited by Raman Selden (1989) "Poststructuralist Theories", *A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, (2nd ed.) Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p. 102.
 133 Jacques Derrida (1976)(1976), *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press.
 134 Theresa de Lauretis (1987), "The Violence of Rhetoric" in *Technologies of Gender*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
 135 As asserted by Rachel Blau DuPlessis in "For the Etruscans", *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter, Virago, p. 273.
 136 Personal Interview, September 1993, Sydney.
 137 "album", *Second Degree Tampering; writing by women*, Sybylla Feminist Press: Melbourne, 1992, p. 153. Due to the brevity of this piece, it has been able to be included in full in the Appendix of this thesis. See Appendix D.
 138 Ibid. p. 154.
 139 Personal Interview, September 1993, Sydney.
 140 Patrizia Calefato (1989), n. p.
 141 "album", p. 154.
 142 S. Ewen and E. Ewen (1982), *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*, New York, McGraw Hill, p. 244.

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- 143 Zygmunt Bauman (1983), "Industrialism, consumerism and power", *Theory Culture & Society*, 1:3, p. 40.
- 144 "album", p. 155.
- 145 Personal interview, September 1993, Sydney.
- 146 "original sin", p. 62.
- 147 Calefato (1989), n. p.
- 148 Martin Heidegger (1977), *Vier Seminar*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, p. 107.

Chapter Six

Structure and Desire: *The Tax Inspector*



This chapter focuses on the gendered and racialized experience of the tax inspector, a figure who is often seen as a symbol of authority and control. The chapter explores the ways in which the tax inspector's role is shaped by gender and race, and how these factors influence the inspector's interactions with taxpayers. The chapter also examines the ways in which the tax inspector's role is shaped by the structure of the tax system, and how these factors influence the inspector's behavior. The chapter concludes by discussing the ways in which the tax inspector's role is shaped by the desire for power and control, and how these factors influence the inspector's behavior.

"Understanding the consumer's mind," wrote ad man Harry Dexter Kitson in 1923, "comes down to the question of enhancing and appealing to desire."

Stuart Ewen ¹⁴⁹

(The mall) is much more than large: a distillation of centuries of leisure pursuits, a haven for the compulsive shopper, and *a metaphor of escape to rather than from suburban life*. (My italics)

Tracey Davis ¹⁵⁰

There is a strange relationship between consumerism and desire. Last century, Nietzsche spoke of the concept of eternal return, the possibility that everything recurs as we once experienced it, and that the recurrence itself recurs as an infinite cycle. His philosophy was that if all things return according to the law of the vicious circle (eternal return), "then all voluntary action is equivalent to a real non-action, or all conscious non-action is equivalent to illusory action."¹⁵¹ As we have seen, consumerism and advertising market deftly and thoroughly on levels that sway in and out of the real and sit more often in the realm of the fictional. Multinational capitalism bargains on not just the eternal replenishment of earth's resources, but on the 'eternal return' of a feeling on the part of the consumer. That feeling is the desire for material goods.

This chapter focuses on the possibilities for representing consumer desire and its illusory kind of 'eternal return' in the contemporary narrative. Previous chapters have already looked at consumerism and narrative in reference to structure, neighbourhood, language, the self and body. We could say that we now have a good sense of where consumerism as fiction is coming from. But where does it go? This chapter is concerned with desire because of its tenuous relationship with the sense of an ending.

Consumer desire is on one level simply a desire for material goods. But in another sense, desire is itself a fictional narrative, and one without ending.

The primary text for discussion in this chapter is Peter Carey's *The Tax Inspector*. This is a very thorough and complex novel, the major concerns of which are numerous. It may at first glance, seem a curious choice for a discussion of consumer desire. But to conclude this thesis, I wanted to look at a fiction set in contemporary suburban Australia, where representing consumerism is not the fiction's complete *raison d'être*. Rather, consumer desire intercepts a number of other themes and preoccupations. Before concentrating on *The Tax Inspector* however, I want to look more closely at some of the issues involved in the structure of consumer desire and its 'eternal return'.

Judith Barry has spoken of the shopper as "the protagonist of a detective story, following her own desire as she moves through the store, but not to the scene of the crime."¹⁵² From the realist tradition we presume that a beginning, a middle and an end is what narratives are made of. In the mall it is not so. How can we examine the structure of a narrative that has no ending?

Meaghan Morris looks at our experience of time in the shopping mall a little differently. She sees the mall as

a 'place' consecrated to timelessness and stasis (no clocks, perfect weather...) yet lived and celebrated, lived and loathed, in ultimately historical terms: for some, as ruptural event (catastrophic or Edenic) in the social experience of community, for others, as *the enduring scene* (as the cinema once was and the home still may be) of all the changes, fluctuations and repetitions of the passing everyday life.(My italics) ¹⁵³

Perhaps the deferral of conclusion, therefore, is tied up with repetition. For while the mall is a fantastic and illusory kind of a place, our experience of it is still intimately

bound up with the everyday. This kind of narrative form is perhaps best illustrated by television's soap opera. The soap opera has that sense of being the *enduring scene* which Morris speaks of in reference to everyday life. And yet, soap operas are important to their viewers, in part, because they never end. As Tania Modleski observes

Tune in tomorrow, not in order to find out answers, but to see what further complications will defer the resolutions and introduce new questions. Thus, the narrative, by placing ever more complex obstacles between desire and fulfilment, makes anticipation of an end, an end in itself.¹⁵⁴

Soap opera narrative indulges in a pattern of repetition and interruption. The fragmentation of the plot is akin to the fragmentation of desire in consumerism. The fictions' revelations, confrontations and events are continually interrupted by telephone calls, unexpected visitors, counterrevelations and switches from one story element to another. These interruptions and repetitions are deliberately designed so that the viewer her/himself might pass in and out of the room in which the television is situated. We are permitted to be torn away, as viewers, by the lived changes, fluctuations and repetitions of our own everyday lives.

According to Roland Barthes, the hermeneutic code, which propounds enigmas, functions by making "expectation...the basic condition for truth; truth, these narratives tell us, is what is *at the end* of expectation. This design implies a return to order, for expectation is a disorder." But of course, soap operas do not end. Consequently, truth for women is seen to lie not "at the end of expectation", but in expectation, not in "return to order", but in (familial) disorder.¹⁵⁵

But the program itself is only part of the narrative experience of watching television. Sean Cubbit makes a valid observation in looking at television (the medium) as a kind of narrative without closure:

The broadcast flow is...a vanishing, a constant disappearing of what has just been shown. The electron scan builds up two images of each frame shown, the lines interlacing form a 'complete' picture. Yet not only is the sensation of movement on screen an optical illusion brought about by the rapid succession of frames: each frame itself is radically incomplete, the line before always fading away, the first scan of the frame all but gone, even from the retina, before the second scan is complete. And because TV viewing is subject to constant distraction, and because "it would be more accurate to say that television is constituted in a dialectic of segmentation without closure", then viewing is also a process of missing.¹⁵⁶

Thus, there is a curious set of similarities between desire in these popular soap opera narratives and desire in the landscape of consumerism.¹⁵⁷ The distractive nature of manufactured desire also relies on a process of missing. This idea might be related to Lyotard's proposal in *The Postmodern Condition*, that narrative is a way of consuming the past, a way of forgetting so that something else can take place.¹⁵⁸ And yet there is also that idea that consumption envisages its own return.

In this contemporary environment, Peter Carey has set *The Tax Inspector*. This is not a novel in which any of the characters are particularly likeable. Most of the action takes place in contemporary suburban Sydney, in particular, in a fictional Outer West suburb called Franklin. Here, the grandmother of the family, Frieda Catchprice, has been directly involved in the transformation of local bushland into 1/4 acre subdivisions known as Catchprice Heights. Subdivisions were appropriately followed by the tracking of the F4 expressway, the pollution of the swimming holes with lead, dioxins and methyl mercury from local factories and the formation of violent gangs of

twelve year old kids high on petrol inhalation making the streets uninhabitable by night for other locals. All of this because "Granny Catchprice had made her life, invented it. When it was not what she wanted, she changed it."¹⁵⁹

And yet, there is something about Granny Catchprice's environment that tells us this is not the case. The reality is that she is distracted. Frieda lives an illusory kind of existence where we could easily apply Nietzsche's idea that "all voluntary action is equivalent to a real non-action, or all conscious non-action is equivalent to illusory action." Early in the novel, we are encouraged to question whether Frieda's state of mind is a result of dementia. But slowly we are given the history of her life's actions. The use of this fictional state of mind to avoid the knowledge of incest occurring between her husband and her own children proves her existence within a 'familial disorder', a life that is expectation. Frieda's desire for her own business - a flower farm - remains unrealised primarily because of the positioning of her own wants behind those of her husband's. Nothing seems to go right. Her life then embodies the narrative process of missing:

You visited your past mistakes and tried to undo them. You held your babies to your breasts and suckled them. You sponged them through their fevered nights. You petted them and wept, knowing that you were doing something wrong that would result in them growing up without properly loving you. (88)

Even realised desires on Frieda's part resume insignificance. Her desire to have streets named after her family, although achieved, becomes little more than evidence of her misinterpretation of what capitalism can become. For the streets are rife with violence, 'no go areas' after dark, and the knowledge of their title's significance is appreciated by nobody but Frieda herself. Only Frieda walks these streets at night and stays miraculously safe. Her safety is assured purely by her state of expectation, designating her to the fictional world:

She was a ghost. She told him she was a ghost as a joke, but she meant all her jokes. This is how it was with ghosts - you stood in one life, but you could see another. You were in one world, but not part of it.(88)

Sunk deep within these same forgotten Franklin streets is the family car dealership. This is a business which ought to be run on, and succeed through, the ethics of consumerism - where they call a potential customer a "Prospect" (145). Instead it is the downfall of everybody involved with it. In an interview, Carey compared the novel to his early short stories with the following anecdote:

You could look at the short stories, which tend to be about people trapped in environments, contained by environments, and they fail to escape, and you could look at the physical form of the car dealership in *The Tax Inspector*, and recognise that there is some commonality in that.¹⁶⁰

Not surprisingly one of Frieda's sons, Jack, is a wealthy property developer. Driving his new lover, the tax inspector, through the snaking city expressways in the comfort of his Jaguar, Jack comments on the way in which the structure of the Cahill Expressway, and others like it, directly reflect the workings of Sydney: "If you look at the Cahill Expressway...you can understand almost all of this city...You can see how corrupt ..(it)..is." (201) And so here is a treatment of our discussion of architecture as structure, from earlier chapters of this thesis. The physical environment of capitalism is shaping or eluding the lives of its occupants. The built environment as manipulative text. Later Jack elaborates: "You can read a city. You can see who's winning and who's losing. In this city...the angels are not winning." (202)

Angels are something of a pre-occupation. Throughout the novel we get the feeling that things are moving too fast. Development has taken over itself. The freeways, in

particular, appear as rapidly destructive metaphors for the change driven by capitalism. History seems to have itself been consumed. The scene is reminiscent of Baudrillard's consideration that contemporary society has 'given over' to speed and motion and technological fixes, creating a kind of crisis in explanatory logic. Contemporary life represents:

The triumph of effect over cause, of instantaneity over time as depth, the triumph of surface and of pure objectification over the depth of desire.¹⁶¹

Perhaps the most interesting character to look at in light of the triumph of 'pure objectification over the depth of desire', is Benny, the aspiring 'angel'. If Frieda's life is expectation, then her grandson's is only an accelerated, more contemporary version of the same. In an environment where we are told that shopping malls are the cathedrals of our time, religious practice can take on many different forms.¹⁶² Benny's 'visualisations' in particular, embody pure objectification to a disturbing degree:

I cannot be what I am.

He was stupid maybe, but he would not continue to be what he was, and when Cathy fired him he had already spent \$400 on a Finance and Insurance course at the Zebra Motor Inn and he had passed it - no problems with the numbers.

He had also spent \$495 on the 'Self-Actualisation' cassettes, \$300 on the suit, \$150 on sundries and, as for where the money came from, that was no one's business and totally untraceable. So when his father began by saying, no way was he going to sell cars, all he did was ask himself 'How do I attain the thing that I desire?'

Then he followed the instructions on the 'Self Actualisation' cassettes, descending the imaginary coloured stairways to the mental picture of the imaginary Sony Trinitron which showed the object of his desire.(21)

The object of Benny's desire varies according to his state of mental health. Initially of course, what he wants is to make a profit from amongst the economic ashes of Catchprice Motors. In contrast to his grandmother Frieda, Benny studies his immediate reality obsessively. His objectification of desire - the obsessive, repetitive thought processes which he uses to search for it in vain - is eventually what destroys him. The propensity for violence which Benny carries with him throughout the novel is closely related to this obsessive objectification. As Judith Barry has noted of objectified desire within consumerism:

The image/object is a mixture of what is present and also what is absent - of fulfilment and lack.¹⁶³

In the Catchprice family, Benny is firstly a victim and secondly a perpetrator of incest. In his experience of capitalism, the vicious circle is no easier on him. Carey himself has noted that Benny's situation might exemplify the ruthless nature of capitalism, and how uncaring it is if you're dumped.¹⁶⁴

Early in the novel, Benny closely examines a pornographic magazine, in particular a woman being sodomised:

The woman's legs were bound with woven metal straps. They looked like battery straps from a fifties Holden...The woman was held at the shoulders and arms...The base was made of moulded fibreglass. It was more or less in the shape of a shallow "n", not a hard thing to make, really easy. You could do it in your backyard, your cellar.(48)

Precisely. Any enterprising young lad could do it, especially with a little help from 'self-actualisation' techniques. It is significant that by the end of the novel Benny has not only made this contraption, but is holding the only other 'self-actualisation' user, Maria, in a strikingly violent attempt to achieve the reconstruction of this pornographic

picture. In an interview with Helen Ifeka, Carey says of the 'self actualisation' element in the novel:

I didn't feel judgemental about it, I mean, I didn't *take it on* . I just meant that they were the sorts of things that people used to make sense of their lives, to control their lives. I mean I was shocked when I went on this writer's tour and this woman said she was going to make a visualisation that weekend, and I discovered what she was doing. To me, it was meant to be a higher spiritual effort, and she wanted a Mercedes Benz, and she was going to make a video of it (laughs). I was sort of shocked by that.¹⁶⁵

In the novel, Benny's use of 'self-actualisation' is no less shocking. On the imaginary Sony Trinitron, he can see whatever he likes. And under the guise of this objectification being a 'higher spiritual effort', Benny draws a very destructive energy. The illusory nature of the exercise means that Benny can imagine himself to be an angel, the epitome of everything holy, and yet actually commit violence of a very serious nature.

We have no knowledge of whether the woman Carey met on a writer's tour, visualising the possession of a Mercedes Benz, felt some spiritual fulfilment in her efforts. That 'she was going to make a video of it' suggests to us the absurdity of the contemporary objectification of desire. And yet it is interesting to consider her enthusiasm, and to look at Benny's situation, taking into account the opinion that:

Consumption is not necessarily evidence of the desire for ownership of commodities for its own sake (that is the dominant ideological meaning of ownership), but it is rather a symptom of the need for control, for cultural autonomy and for security that the economic system denies subordinated peoples.¹⁶⁶

Rather than a conscious drive toward spirituality, Benny's obsession is precisely about this need for control, autonomy and security. Benny is under the illusion that shaving all the hair from his body, going blonde, purchasing a suit and getting a wing tattooed onto the length of his back, makes him an angel. "What does it mean?" asks his father. "It means I am in control," retorts Benny. "It means everyone does as I say." (155) This conversation takes place during the son's incestuous seduction of the father. Benny attempts to be the seducer, rather than the seduced, misunderstanding the nature of power in incest, not having the strength or power to actually leave it all behind.

That Benny's transformation is only skin deep is reinforced in a conversation between Benny and his Hari Krishna brother, Vish. Benny's objective at this particular point in the novel, he tells Vish, is to buy a block of land at Catchprice Heights for the two of them. Vish remains unimpressed and unconvinced: "Even if you had plastic surgery you couldn't change. I couldn't either. We're both going to be the same for all eternity." (102) Vish consequently reveals not only the vacuous nature of Benny's obsessive material desire, but the habitual, repetitive nature of it. The fact that it cannot and will not be changed. As their conversation continues, the level of Benny's miscomprehension of himself and of the material desires he is aimed at with his 'self-actualisation' techniques, becomes astoundingly clear. Yet not to Benny himself:

Benny hesitated. 'There's angels for all of us,' he said, standing up and brushing at his trousers...He smiled and folded his hands behind his back like a salesman in the lot and Vish, seeing the clear confidence in his eyes, thought, once again, that his brother was mentally unwell. (103)

Benny's attempt to transform himself comes from a real need to escape his environment and his position as victim. But while spiritual desire is a real need, material desire is strung along deftly and without reflection by the nature of the contemporary environment with its F&I courses at the Zebra Motor Inn, its fast cars

and Gucci shoes and its glorification of sexual violence. His is the same kind of personal misunderstanding that Tracey Davis speaks of when she says that the mall, as the cathedral of consumerism, serves as the metaphor for escape to rather than from suburban life. Because of the illusory nature of consumer desire, we can imagine ourselves escaping from the everyday suburban world while actually enacting economic support for it, thus keeping the vicious circle in motion. This is perhaps why advertising, like Benny's cassettes, is increasingly geared toward manipulating desires that may or may not have anything at all to do with the product being sold. The fiction is part of the deal.

Repeatedly, the attempt to attain desire is spent, while the consumer is left unchanged. There is a definite openendedness to this, and at the end of *The Tax Inspector*, all of the characters miraculously survive the bombing of Catchprice motors, only to wander aimlessly about wondering what to do with themselves. In the cellar, the severely injured Benny still wears his wing tattoo, which Carey describes thus: "It was red, blue, green, luminous, trembling like a dragonfly, like something smashed against the windscreen of a speeding car." (279) In many ways, this is the speeding car of capitalism. Boundaries between life and death - beginning and ending - are not strict. The car merely continues.

¹⁴⁹ Ewen Stuart (1988), *All Consuming Images; The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, USA: Basic Books, p. 47.

¹⁵⁰ Tracey C. Davis (1991), p. 13.

¹⁵¹ My interpretation of Nietzsche's 'eternal return' comes essentially from Pierre Klossowski in "Nietzsche's Experience of Eternal Return", in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. David B. Allison, Dell Publishing: New York, 1979.

¹⁵² Judith Barry (1991), p. 17.

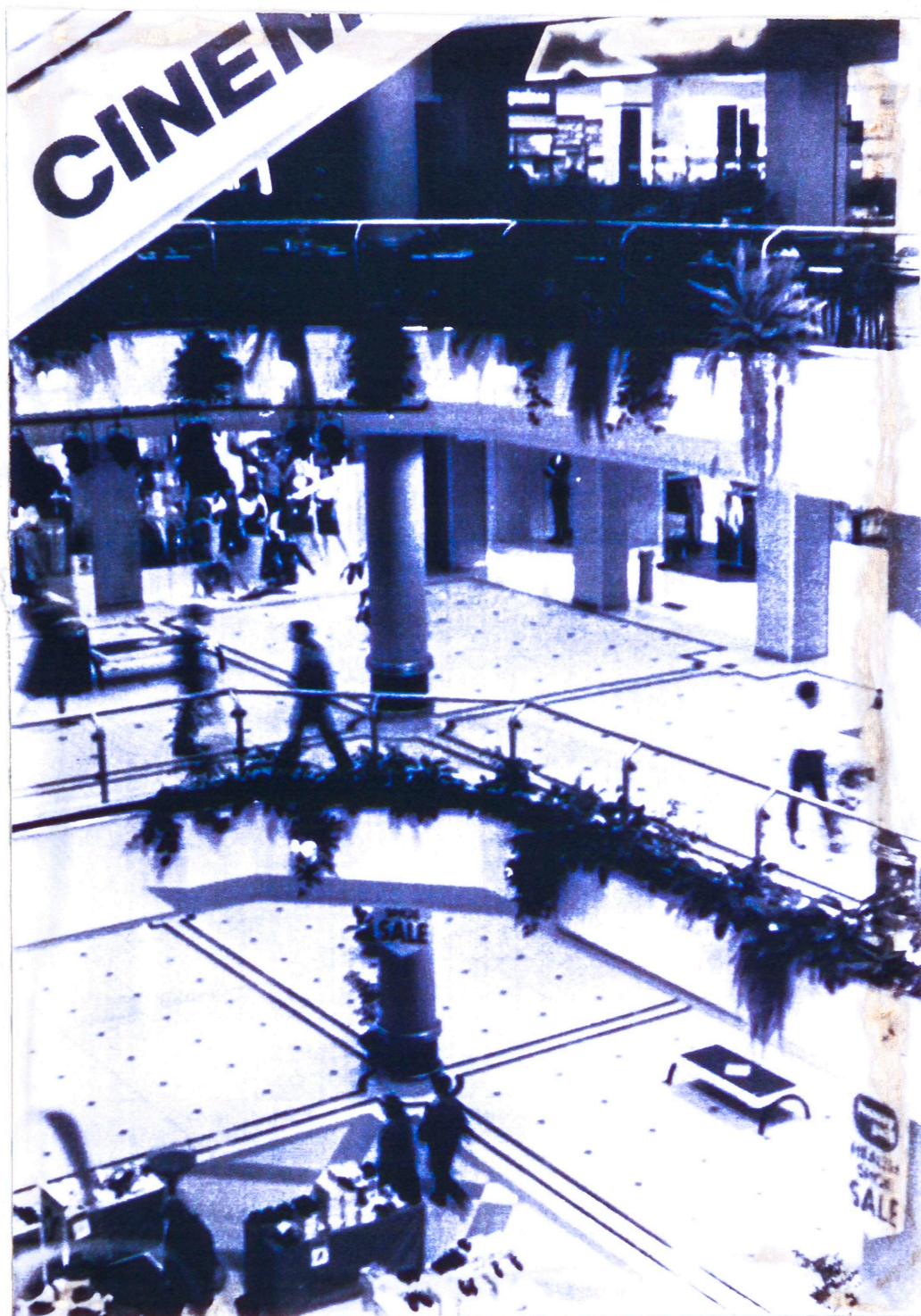
¹⁵³ Meaghan Morris (1989), p. 206.

¹⁵⁴ Tania Modleski, (1990), p. 191

¹⁵⁵ Modleski (1990), in reference to Roland Barthes (1974), *S/Z*, New York: Hill and Wang, p. 76.

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- 156 Sean Cubbitt (1991), p. 30-1, making reference to Fever (1983), p. 15-6)
- 157 It is worth keeping in mind of course, that the soap opera is a function of consumerism. Advertising during these afternoon programmes is what is important to the television stations. Soap operas have been selling Fabulon, Best and Less merchandise, weight loss programs and the like for as long as they have been on air in Australia.
- 158 Jean Francois Lyotard (1984)*The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 159 Peter Carey (1991) *The Tax Inspector*, University of Queensland Press: St Lucia, QLD. p. Paperback edition. All references are to this same edition and page numbers will be given in parentheses within the text.
- 160 Carey in interview with Helena Ifeka, Hermes 1992, p. 17.
- 161 Baudrillard (1986).
- 162 John Fiske (1989) makes the observation that "Metaphor constructs similarity out of difference and when a metaphor becomes a cliché, as the shopping mall - cathedral one has, then a resisting reading must align itself with the differences rather than the similarities, for clichés become clichés only because of their centrality to common sense."p. 13.
- 163 Barry (1991), p. 38.
- 164 Carey in interview with Helena Ifeka, Hermes 1992, p. 23.
- 165 Ibid. p. 20.
- 166 Fiske (1989) p. 32.

Afterwords



Miranda Fair continues to claim to be the largest shopping mall in the Southern Hemisphere. Due to the mall's state of constant renovation and expansion, even regular users cannot boast orientation in this constantly discontinuous space. The mall itself glitters with spectacle through a plethora of commodities, services and visual displays. Miranda Fair's advertising slogan, "Everything You Want", provided an impetus early in this author's experiential study, to investigate the relationship between the shopping mall and fictions of both a personal and a collective nature.

The objective of the opening chapter to this thesis, was to foreground the concept of the *fictioning continuum*, that is, the way in which the structure of the shopping mall works as an omnipresent and deliberate fiction, particularly in regard to space. This discussion of discontinuity in space and its construction of a fiction that is ostensibly pervasive, set up a number of tensions that remained pertinent to arguments throughout the thesis.

Deconstructing the mall, the argument in the first chapter also enabled a consideration of simulacra as a day to day experience. It proposed that the mall is able to set itself up as a kind of "impossible world" in the same way that fiction inherently does. *The Cat's Cradle* tackles the concept of such "impossible worlds", particularly in relation to the organisation of space. This particular short film thereby questions possibilities for the existence of community within the disorientating spaces of consumerism.

The second chapter of the thesis then picked up where *The Cat's Cradle* left off, looking particularly at the demise of community under consumer capitalism. The discussion centred around a short film by David Caesar appropriately titled *Shoppingtown*. Notions of community were questioned in the light of Kowinski's proposal that with the coming of the mall, whole towns disappear. Privately owned public space does not claim to be responsible for the non-economic aspects of

community and neighbourhood. As the large shopping malls consume increasingly large amounts of space in both long-standing central business districts and in the skirting bushland of new suburbs, the concept of the local is increasingly overlooked. Furthermore, the fictioning continuum inside the structure of the mall provides for little, if any interactions of an interpersonal level?

These understandings were formed around the basic conclusion that in the Australian context, the existence of the primary interactive ties that make up community are not to be found within the privately owned space of the shopping mall. Nevertheless, possibilities for reinstating cultural differences and for interrupting the image of ultimate social cohesion as portrayed through consumer capital are given much needed attention in contemporary narratives such as *Shoppingtown*. This film's meta-fictional and self-conscious narrative language is spoken in order to obstruct the 'imagined community' and capitulate the local and the different into existence.

Given that these differences of a cultural, local or political nature are excluded from the image portrayed through consumer capital, the third chapter moved to concentrate particularly on narrative possibilities for voicing difference through language. This chapter questioned the assumption that consumerism is able to behave as an empowering language for women and consequently argued against notions of engendered public space, deconstructing the idea that the shopping mall is a women's domain. The course of the argument examined the writing of John Fiske in conjunction with a piece of short fiction by Gig Ryan.

The conclusion was that consumerism can not consistently behave as an empowering language for women and can work, along with the engendering of shopping places as women's domains, to limit women's experience and discourse. Gig Ryan's writing provided an important example of women's struggle with the politics of representation and therefore with language as a container of immutable truths. In light of this,

Ryan's work demonstrates a multiplicity of relations that position subjects in an accordingly complex pattern of personal, interpersonal and communal discourses.

Gig Ryan's use of fragmentation to reject definitive language boundaries then foregrounded the content of discussion for Chapter Four. Fragmentation seems to be a given when considering the representation of the contemporary self. This fragmentation forms a contradictory state, both celebratory and lonely. The discussion in this chapter concentrated on *Red Roses*, the most recent work by Ania Walwicz, and looked at Walwicz's representation of the self in terms of the kind of 'looking' encouraged by consumer capitalism. Some of the issues raised included an exploration of the ways in which consumerism encourages the ideology of individualism, and questions of whether the seduction of advertising succeeds because of its play on an individual's quest for knowledge.

It was found that the preoccupation with one's own identity and its possibilities is encouraged on every level by consumer capitalism. Commodities are considered because of the identities one might associate with them. Subsequently a whole series of possible identities are constantly in the process of being appropriated and discarded as we shop. Walwicz's *Red Roses*, however, showed that this process is not inherently negative. The self need not reject any role-play offered, because it is through such multiplicity that one is able to inquire into the social constructedness of selves. This position enables not only pleasure, play, and a place for the fictional in the everyday, but allows for the discontents, the expenditure, and the exhaustion of day to day life.

Our insertion as individual subjects into the shopping mall environment is a physical set of circumstances as much as it is psychological or political event. Because of consumerism's emphasis on image, the body itself is also subject to certain manipulation by the fantasy of advertising. Drawing on Chapter Four's discussion of

the self in relation to the material fiction of the image, Chapter Five looks particularly at the physical body in relation to consumerism. Consumer products are swallowed, implanted and taken in by the body. The shopping mall, meanwhile, sets itself up as a plethora of bodily metaphors. Such circumstance provides much impetus for contemporary fiction writers to reinvent the body in fiction.

The new physical body has become something which is inextricable from the consumer basis of contemporary living. There are no boundaries. The body in the fiction of Joanne Burns is a substitutable, even artificial body. This has resounding effects on the contemporary character, who seems to exist in a curious state of limbo. Whilst the previous chapter discovered an element of freedom to this fragmented state, Burns' writing centres the self in relation to the body and reveals a state of expectation that is not entirely comforting. Shopping for a virtual self is fun and we are partial to it, but consumerism too often harbours an absence of the spiritual body, the natural body and our environment as an intricately balanced resource. These things are calling at the back of our minds. Considering these interests, the thesis concludes with a chapter that contemplates where it is that consumerism is taking us.

Multinational capitalism bargains on not just the eternal replenishment of earth's resources, but on the 'eternal return' of a feeling on the part of the consumer. That feeling is the desire for material goods. The final chapter thus focuses on the possibilities for representing consumer desire and its illusory kind of 'eternal return' in the contemporary narrative. This chapter expresses a concern about consumer desire because of its tenuous relationship with the sense of an ending. Consumer desire is demonstrated as, on one level, simply a desire for material goods, but in another sense, as a fictional narrative without resolution. The *Tax Inspector* is examined closely as a text which might reveal some of the complexities of these issues.

In *The Tax Inspector*, characters such as Granny Catchprice and Benny exist in a state of constant expectation. The distractive nature of consumer desire is examined as a narrative that relies heavily on the process of missing. Repeatedly, the attempt to attain desire is spent, while the consumer is left unchanged. Benny's superficial attempt to transform himself into an angel comes from a real need to escape his environment and his position as victim. But while spiritual desire is a real need, material desire is strung along deftly and without reflection by the nature of the contemporary environment - with its F&I courses at the Zebra Motor Inn, its fast cars and Gucci shoes and its glorification of sexual violence. Because of the illusory nature of consumer desire, we can imagine ourselves escaping from the everyday suburban world and changing our lives, while actually merely enacting economic support for consumerism. This is perhaps why advertising, like Benny's cassettes, is increasingly geared toward manipulating desires that may or may not have anything at all to do with the product being sold. The fiction is part of the deal, and continues without denouement.

Both freedoms and discontents stem from the organisation of our daily experience beneath consumerism. This thesis has argued that the shopping mall typifies this organisation. Because of this, the mall provides an example of how the structure of the fictioning continuum takes hold, physically, psychologically and politically. In turn, the film and literature examined through the course of the thesis serves to demonstrate the way in which this same organisation intercepts the contemporary Australian environment.

The position of consumer allows for pleasure, play and the place for an active production of the fictional within the everyday. And yet this launch of our consumer bodies, our selves, our communities into the mall and its ideologies, also brings into view its own set of difficulties, containments and exclusions. Thinking about the structures of multi-national capitalism as they are confronted in the writing and

filmmaking of local authors provides satisfaction and confrontation within a form - fiction - that is cleverly equipped and highly appropriate.

I would like to recover a fiction from my own collection, which I think highlights many of the discussions and challenges encompassed within this thesis. "Living Rooms" plays a particular function within the book it is a part of. Nevertheless, I hope that by reprinting within this context it may play a slightly different role, in light of the body of theory preceding it. We have considered physical space, neighbourhood, language, the body, the self and the sense of an ending. I leave you with just a fragment of fiction.

Living Room

Here in these big furniture departments it's like visiting someone without having to say anything. Or using someone else's things without asking. A change from your own lounge room. There's occasional chairs and easy chairs. Night and days. Rockers. The modern. The chrome. The Queen Anne. The Louis Quatorze. The Empire. So many positions in which to sit.

Appendix A

what a waste

When I hear the trains go by, it sounds like work. They pay you to die slowly, in a swamp of inertia. They're so nice you're bored. Their second rate marriages. Yeah sure you're *going* to. Their hopes muggy like the air conditioning. And yet they're human. Love swells at half past three before you go home and you're contented. Contentment presses up its grey shield. You look out grey windows at a blue sky. The trains crash down each layer of the station. Feet jamming the escalator's steel comb. The smell of dissipated energy, of despair, smothering its giftshop hand over you. Noise swills inside the head. Faces smile over their grey desks. The open-plan office like a cemetery and their smiles full of lives they reek envy and despair chatting out of their heads. The little boss propped in grey silhouette along the blind's strips. He toddles out in the eye his small brown and red eyes in his red and blue sick skin. His voice caked in smoke and the usual beer. His shaky voice anyway talks sentences. Where they taught him he goes up and down. He sits straight up in his chair. His face cracks open to a friend. His sentence grinds to a dead halt (silence) he looks you straight in the phone.

She's bright as a button old Marg, he says, impeccably even though a typist. There's no mistaking. She picks things up like that his textured pink shirt-sleeve zips the air. He looks benevolently down his nose.

They make conversation out of nothing. If you don't listen to the words, you can hear their voices stretch and whine a scale of boredom. He turns his attention to the woman like a microscope his words prattling and jilting his voice twinkles her cheek. He pushes his pram of attention. The patronizing men move off in their quiet grey clothes their hushed voices. His pretty ribbon words she springs to catch his sweet knife she marks on her ribs, latches.

The bland shopping centre heat slaps against your head, the flat blue cloudless sky hangs behind the square white outline of the complex. I walk around and around it, anything is better than the grey cowering air-conditioning. He waits in the lunch room to expound his brains. I read the paper bent with my back to him, but he persists, baiting for war, defending America's 'democracy' at the drop of a crumb, his voice which had waited, ready to carp on, carps on softly, mildly, reasonably, carping on, as blood swills inside my head, his blue eyes picked in his red skin which had waited also to be paid attention like a receipt, to exist. I wrap up his cashed words in a mane of silence, his affected reasonable barbs reason their way into the back of my neck coming out of his mouth like a caption I read it and get fired that he interrupts for a start wanting to bridle me and to avert the cling between my eyes and the paper He hogs my last free minute and then takes you back like a patient guided gently into your personal jail for the rest of the afternoon at the staring clock and her terrified plastic coldness that I've given up on or kill Her voice banging up and down in mindless rhythm behind sheets of work dumbly directing, not actually driving, beneath her and nothing I do pleases being out of line.

Ms Princely continues her thick potted arguments and complaints through the trellis of files I move away from choked and christened with, her twice wife's mouth like a fish opening and shutting for air or steam as little discoloured pearly bubbles blurt in and

out over her dumbfound eyes Why do you always argue? she says, always arguing. You have no respect, she says, having no respect, as I wrap myself in arrogance like a stole To hate so vastly and imperiously is like a blessing I cleanse myself in I clock back to my desk like a throne, martyred and pinnacled on her hive of pettiness Look at my boys, harmlessly working away, she directs the two 30-yr-old clerks to file away her letters, husbands, face-packs, the articles on assertiveness-training for women that she henges around, solidifying with the other women, me for instance, only for a tableau to be looked at, a wall to be pillaged She treats the girls like tripe Here are two little nights out of the hundreds that are mine to delegate, she bodkins the extra dough to her chest, greed guttered on her stick tiara, she presses Jack and his endless performing dinner to the phone as he husbands to meet his meal at the platform to prick it home, an bit extra for your trip, two little gassed nights for you when I allow and dub thee, she nervily generously trolleys out to me I have a wiry taxless stressless job for you she rankles on I stare at the pigeons on the balcony I swim the channel as she clusters to the point She gives it to me, to placate the cutlery of her papers, to dry them and dress them and wipe them I kneel on the floor in my arrow suit dusting up as her lion dollies charge anachronistically through the arena ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Gig Ryan, (1992), *Second Degree Tampering*, Melbourne: Sybylla Feminist Press, 47-50.

Appendix B

public places

since I've had my neck in a brace activities that seemed intrinsic to my daily existence have been somewhat impossible to continue. but in a way i'm glad. for i had become what some people might call an obsessive. for a number of years, turning around - whether leaving a bus a train a shop a restaurant a room a street corner a friend - had become second nature to me. turning around to check i'd left nothing behind. at first i'd just do it in public places but later i'd even do it in my own home. i couldn't move from room to room without turning around to check that i hadn't left anything there. a tissue a hair a biscuit crumb a toe a finger an odour a desire a thought. well, you can imagine the wear and tear on my neck. you only get one of them.

perhaps i'd been turning my head around and back, around and back without having full consciousness of what i was doing, ever since i was born. but that's something i suppose i'll never know. the specialist says i'm wearing the discs away. he says i'll have to keep this brace on for a couple of months. i don't like the tablets he's given me. they make me feel quite peculiar. but they do alleviate the pain. of course i do as he says. i want my neck to get better, to return to a reasonable working order. at least i want to be able to turn my head in comfort so i can check if anyone's following me. there's that many weird people walking about in these troubled times. not only in the flesh, there are plenty of spirits too. the shopping centres are full of them.

because i travel by train frequently, i have been in quite embarrassing, even dangerous situations. one day several years ago, as i turned my head to check i hadn't left anything on the seat i got caught as the automatic doors started to close. i was jammed between them, and the train started moving. fortunately a young man pressed

the emergency button, but the train guard was rude enough to abuse me for holding up the train even though i explained how the incident had occurred. people can be so unpleasant. you wouldn't believe the number of people who giggle when i turn back to check i haven't left a perspiration patch on the seat. i feel the heat a lot. and the trains can be so stuffy. i keep a tissue in a convenient spot so i can wipe away the traces of my person from the seat. i feel weird, not quite whole if i leave my personal moisture in public places. people don't seem to understand. perhaps it doesn't happen to them. i could just be unique.

it's the same on buses. sometimes on the bus i get absorbed in my own thoughts. i certainly don't want anyone else to see them. to read them. sometimes my thoughts are so powerful they expand and float outside my head. it may sound crazy but i've read books about this sort of thing. books with illustrations. the experts call them thought forms. when the bus reaches my stop i have to turn around and check these thoughts have gathered themselves together and slipped back inside my head. some people are just paranoid. quite a few times they've thought i'd turned around to stare at them. but why would i want to do that.

actually, till recently i'd never had any problems with my neck. plenty of people i knew back in my twenties and thirties were always going off to the chiropractor for neck adjustments, but not me. maybe i was born with a strong one. that's why i still get a shock when i catch sight of myself in the mirror wearing this brace. my neck started to give me trouble about twelve months ago. i realised there were some real gossips in the building where i have my apartment. every time i'd get home there would be a couple of people on the stairs or in the hallway having intimate little chats. i'd been having some interesting thoughts and daydreams and i didn't want any of them to be obvious to strangers. so i had to be careful. on this particular evening i turned back too sharply to check my thoughts hadn't floated off somewhere down the hallway. and i felt this sharp pain run down my neck. agony. for hours i couldn't move my neck even one centimetre. that's why i decided to get a metal strip put at the base of my front door. then i wouldn't have to check that any part of me had

slipped through the space under the door. i have such plans dreams visions. i wouldn't want anyone to steal them. you've only got to look at the way the media invade people's privacy these days to realise no one's life is really private or safe anymore.

of course, now that i've got this brace, going out poses a few problems. i try to take as little as possible with me. nothing that won't fit into a pocket. then i'm not tempted to turn around so much, checking. and i've learnt to control my thoughts. so they can't escape from my head. my big new hat helps. as well as the tablets my doctor gave me for my neck. a lot of the time they make me feel quite empty. sort of numb.

the other week, lying in the safety of my bed i had a realisation. you leave your fingerprints on a lot of the products on the shelves when you go to the supermarket, because it's essential to check the expiry dates on all sorts of things. there's so much of your personal history left behind on those jars, packets, tins. what science can extract from a fingerprint these days is nobody's business. it makes me feel uneasy. so i'm going to take a thin pair of plastic gloves with me next time i go shopping. you know, the ones the doctors use. they don't impede the grip of your fingers. i wouldn't want a jar of coffee to slip through my fingers and smash on the floor. coffee's so expensive.

and there's something else that's bothering me. now that they've got electronic scanning at the supermarket the price of the product is publicly visible although it's invisible on the packaging. just say that the government decided to eliminate the problem of people losing their identity cards. what if they decided to electronically print everyone's personal details on their bodies. then you'd never feel secure in yourself. you might be caught out by scanners anywhere anytime. anyone around could know things about you. being in a public place would be like walking across a

minefield in a war zone. and what if they made a mistake with the information. you never know whose history you could end up wearing.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Joanne Burns (1992 a) *On a Clear Day*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, p. 19-21.

album

you thought it might be worth trying. better than being sent to the kookas again for taking part in the riots. you were fortunate to be one of the twenty chosen to participate in the pilot scheme of the album plan. most other troublers still had to do their time in the k's, but anything was better than being locked up in a dark room, crackling with loud laughter, for ten hours at a time. it made you feel lilliputian. the continued assault of laughter attacking from invisible ducts in quadraphonic sound made you shake and cry. you found it impossible to regain your sense of humour when you were released. although you were determined that the kookas would never stifle your intentions to keep protesting against government philosophy. there would always be those who would make public their disapproval of the debt levy. why should the provident and the poor have to be penalised, some forced to exist on rations, because of others' profligate ways. still, you decided to join the album plan because it sounded less of an ordeal than the k's. it would give your nerves a rest.

four times a day, every six hours, it would summon you with its simulated bell call, not unlike church bells you occasionally heard in old movies. it was quite beautiful, a carillon they used to call it. you checked it in the encyclopaedisc. after the first few days you were always ready at least five minutes before lens line-up. your hair neatly brushed high back from your forehead. face freshly shaved. teeth cleaned. the tv turned down, the visible parts of your apartment dusted and straightened up. then you would calmly pose in one of the ten suggested positions to have your portrait, your condition recorded by the tiny pink video camera installed in your living quarters. nothing hidden about it. it was there right before you to see. pearly pink. cyclopina 111 was its official name. you had come to realise how lucky you were to have been chosen for this trial scheme. this self assessment program. in fact you were enjoying the whole procedure. you'd been fascinated by your own image for a long time. even

when you took your first steps at ten months they were towards a full length mirror. when your image appeared immediately on the screen below the lens you were required to key in your report on any changes in your facial expressions. any negativity, any hints of anti-social feelings were to be observed and commented on. this way it was felt that individuals could share, contribute to their rehabilitation. it was a way to divert useless social resentments and rebellions. to discard them like old skins. they did nothing to enhance your physical appearance. they made one look troubled, wrinkled, aged. with lips tight, twisted. forehead red and frowning. the program had been designed so that at the end of one month subjects who had displayed excellent self awareness and self monitoring skills: noticing, commenting on every facial mood, category inventoried on the central grid at the state psychobank, would be emancipated from their felon tag and given the opportunity to promote and exemplify the benefits of the album scheme. as a member of the narcissus team you would be able to give lectures on tv and tour both urban and rural precincts giving witness to your personal transformation you would play a video documentary of your changed, more salubrious countenance. not just quick before and after images. something much more thorough. you would be allowed to edit the film, choose the best shots. you would even be allowed to draft your own script from your original reports. posters of your testimonial would be displayed in public places you would become a celebrity, promoting the virtues of the album scheme of self knowledge to the general population. you would knock on doors. insist on people's responses. you would recommend they agree to cyclopina (it wasn't mandatory) once a month, the equipment being installed free of charge. you would explain the range of recording postures available to them. you were to report anyone showing hostility to the scheme. they would be close-uped by needle cam, recently installed at every road gate in the state, and because you would be making such a contribution to society you would be able to join the ranks of those who had already received life long exemptions from the debt levy.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Joanne Burns (1992 b) *Second Degree Tampering*, Melbourne: Sybylla Feminist Press, p. 153-5.

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